

Sri Kumud Nath Dutta

14C, KALI KUMAR BANERJEE LANE
TALA, CALCUTTA-2.

VLADIMIR POPOV

*Steel
and Slag*

A NOVEL

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow 1923

TRANSLATED
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CHAPTER ONE

DUBENKO, the works director, called in the manager of the open-hearth shop and handed him a weighty memorandum book—specifications for the manufacture and rolling of a new grade of steel.

"We're shifting to a very complex alloy steel, Comrade Krainev," he said, "Armour plate, for tanks."

His tone admitted of no objections: but Krainev did object:

"Pyotr Ivanovich, our melters have never handled such steel before."

"Well, they'll handle it now. The war demands it."

Deliberately withholding the telegram received from the People's Commissar, who set a week's time for the fulfilment of this defence assignment, Dubenko added:

"I expect the first heat in three days, Sergei Petrovich."

"You can't mean that seriously, Pyotr Ivanovich. It'll take two days just to read the specifications," said the shop manager, weighing the bulky document in his hand.

"Read at night, and use the daytime to get ready," the director returned. "In three days, then." He got up, evidently considering that nothing more remained to be said.

Ordinarily, in making new assignments, the director accepted the time limits set by the people who were to carry his assignments out, demanding only—and with the utmost stringency—that these limits, once set, be punctiliously observed.

"I didn't hurry you; you named your own time," he would say in such cases.

But now he was setting the time himself, and it was bewilderingly brief.

"I can't do it in three days," Krainev told him bluntly.

"Just you try not to," the director exclaimed.

Sergei Petrovich was amazed by Dubenko's harsh tone, by the stern lines in which his face had set. Never before had he seen the director in such a mood.

Returning to the shop, Krainev assembled his assistants, shift managers, and foremen, and acquainted them with the new specifications.

"We'll have to turn everything upside down," was the uneasy comment of the head furnace foreman, Opanasenko---an enormous man, so fat that his chair creaked under his weight.

"What will we do with the ingots, Sergei Petrovich?" asked the teeming foreman. "We've always sent them straight to the rolling mill, but for this new grade we'll have to keep them in soaking pits. Where are we going to dig the pits?"

More and more difficulties were brought up. Krainev heard his subordinates out attentively, giving them plenty of time to argue every point.

It was late evening before their study of the specifications drew to a close. Turning the last page, the shop manager looked intently into the faces around him. Opanasenko, deeply concerned by the complications of the work ahead, wore an expression of helpless perplexity. Krainev smiled. In simple, everyday language, he summed up concisely the new process just discussed at such length.

The head foreman looked more cheerful.

"That makes it easier," he said. "We'll manage."

The new instructions required the abandonment of traditions grown up at the works in the course of many years—required a complete reorganization of the shop, to be accomplished in a few short days.

Up to that time, the shop had made steel chiefly for girders and rails; now it must make steel that would resist armour piercing shells. Preparations began.

The specifications pointed out that this steel, while in process of production, was very sensitive to moisture. Again, it could not stand sudden cooling, and when subjected to drafts, to a flow of cold air, would "catch cold," displaying tiny hair cracks on fracture. Hence, it demanded gradual cooling in special soaking pits.

And so, the workers of the open-hearth shop set to: erecting drying plant, digging huge pits and fitting covers to them, checking scales, drawing up calculations, drafting diagrams, and erecting bins for materials the shop had never before required.

Morning and evening, the director would make the rounds of the shop, stopping frequently to talk with the workers.

On the third day, he came up to the shop manager and asked when the first heat could be expected.

Krainev reported the situation. Turning away, the director told him glumly:

"I give you two more days."

But two days passed, and still the first heat was not launched. Again Dubenko summoned the shop manager.

"When?" he demanded sharply.

"In another three days, no sooner," said Krainev, making a great effort to restrain his irritation.

He had hardly slept in all this time, and was tired to the verge of collapse.

"Three more days?" Dubenko repeated, greatly dissatisfied.

Krainev rose heavily to his feet and went back to the shop.

There were no extra hands, and workers of the most varied trades stayed overtime day after day, helping to prepare the shop for the new defence assignment.

Two days later the director once more appeared in the shop, this time accompanied by Makarov, the chief engineer. Krainev and Makarov were old friends: former fellow melters, and fellow students. They had separated only when, on graduation from the metallurgical institute where they had gained their engineering diplomas, they were assigned positions in different plants.

It was only two months since Krainev's transfer to his present position, from another section of the Donbas. Nobody at the works, however, regarded him as a newcomer. He had evinced from the first an ability and experience which relieved Makarov of all uneasiness for the open-hearth shop: and most of the chief engineer's time was now spent at the armour-plate rolling mill, where preparations were under way for rolling the new armour steel.

"We've got to start sometime," Dubenko told Krainev. His voice was strained and nervous.

"I'll start when I have everything ready," replied Krainev firmly. "I'll start when I can be sure the first heat will come out exactly right. It's not in my plans to spoil the steel, or the reputation of our shop, or—well, or my own reputation, either."

Dubenko, flaring up at once, exclaimed:

"I insist that you begin today!"

But Makarov drew the director aside.

"Pyotr Ivanovich," he said quietly. "Krainev is right. He'll be running the first few heats himself, to teach the foremen and melters. He has no right to make mistakes."

Dubenko's wrath subsided somewhat.

"Well, then, when do you promise the first heat?" he asked, turning back to Krainev.

"Tomorrow afternoon," Krainev replied briefly.

The director looked into his face attentively, noting the signs of fatigue.

"Get some rest before you begin," he said more mildly. "Be sure you get some rest."

"Why tomorrow afternoon?" asked Matviyenko, secretary of the shop Party bureau, when the director and Makarov were gone. "Didn't you tell me the first heat would be tapped tonight? Remember, I said I was on duty at the Party committee tonight, and I was sorry because I couldn't be on hand."

"It will be tapped tonight, true enough," Krainev admitted. "Only I don't want the director around."

Coming into the shop that night, Gayevoi, secretary of the works Party committee, stopped by the control board in the corner, attentively watching the throng which had gathered around one of the furnaces. Many of the workers present had been on duty in the preceding shift. Gayevoi called to one of these.

"What are you doing here, Shatilov?" he asked when the worker came up, looking enquiringly into the energetic face.

Gayevoi had always liked this young foreman, with the scorched eyebrows and the scar across

his chin—an ex-soldier, who had retained from his army service, besides military carriage and precision of movement, that peculiar facility in issuing and obeying orders so typical of junior army commanders.

“What do you mean?” Shatilov demanded, staring at Gayevoi in frank surprise. “I’ve stayed on after my shift. After all, it’s the first heat, and such steel! Why, Lyutov’s here, even, and his shift comes on in the morning.” Shatilov pointed to a stocky, broad-shouldered foreman standing a little apart from the rest. “If we don’t watch, how are we going to learn? The shop manager won’t be running every heat for us.” And Shatilov hurried back to the furnace.

Gayevoi remained where he was, quietly watching. Krainev’s manner soon calmed his anxiety. The shop manager directed the work composedly as one engaged in the most ordinary daily task. Yet everything in the shop pointed to the unusual nature of what was taking place. The furnace had been freshly whitewashed, the metal structures painted; the tools were arranged in model order, and the alloying constituents lay in neat piles on the charging level.

Here, head foreman Onnasenko was in command. Although, in the general run of work,

Opanasenko mastered new grades of steel almost independently, this armour alloy was more than he could cope with. Krainev, however, considerate of the head foreman's pride, phrased the necessary instructions as simple requests for advice; and Opanasenko worked with his usual conscientious thoroughness.

Proudly, he showed Krainev the test sheet just brought from the laboratory. Both phosphorus and sulphur were extraordinarily low. Never in his life had he encountered steel so free of these elements.

"Hadn't we better add some nickel?" Krainev suggested quietly.

The furnace crew seized their charging scoops. Even the onlookers turned suddenly into participants. And the little heap of silvery squares disappeared rapidly into the furnace. Some, slipping from the scoops, tinkled lightly against the floor.

Gayevoi noted with surprise that the shop manager had chosen for the first heat of the new steel the Comsomol furnace,* run by workers far younger and less experienced than the others in the shop. But, noting the confidence of melter

* Comsomol furnace—a furnace entirely manned by workers who are members of the Comsomol, or Communist Youth League.—*Trans.*

Nikitenko and the smooth teamwork of the entire crew, he was soon assured that the choice was not mistaken.

When the next test came from the express laboratory, Krainev ordered an assay taken.

Instead of the usual display of fireworks, the steel came out of the spoon without a single spark, and spread quietly, like oil. When poured into the test mould, it filled it evenly, forming a gleaming, mirror-like surface.

Whispered exclamations came from the on-lookers.

"Like mercury," said Shatilov softly, breathless with admiration. He turned to ask something of Krainev, but the latter had already started for the back of the furnace, where the helpers were waiting impatiently at the spout for the word of command.

The watchers followed, and stopped by the rail in tense expectation.

No matter how many years a man has worked in open-hearth shops, no matter how much metal he has made in his day, the tapping of the furnace, the instant when the steel is born, can never fail to move him. It is always a moment of tension and of triumph. In many shops, it is still the custom to announce the forthcoming

event by beating a metal disk— not slow, measured beats, but rapid, joyous clangor.

This time, nobody touched the disk. Sound signals had been forbidden. But no signal was needed. From all parts of the shop, the workers gathered— some on the charging level, others along the teeming box, where all was in readiness to receive the steel.

Krainev glanced at his watch, and then at Opanasenko. A few seconds passed in silence. Then he nodded. The furnace helpers raised their long iron bar and launched a few powerful, well-directed blows at the plugged tap hole.

Flame burst, roaring dully, from the opening, and immediately brightened. A dazzling stream of liquid steel rushed with a heavy roar into the ladle.

The teeming bay seemed afire. The crane track girders and the girders supporting the roof, sunk in shadow until the tapping, now stood forth in clear outline. The watchers could see even the gleaming eyes of the crane driver, waiting in his cab for the signal to lift the ladle with its load of steel.

Only a moment before, all had yet been in the power of the man who directed the process. There had still been the possibility of changing, of correcting, the ratio of mixture. But now

the choice had been made. The decision was final. In some twenty or thirty minutes, the liquid steel would begin to harden in the iron ingot moulds.

Krainev looked up. Catching the crane driver's eye, he pointed to the ladle. Enormous hooks clicked into place. Slowly rising, the ladle moved heavily across the shop towards the teeming bay.

The teemers hurried in the same direction. They, too, were present in far greater force than usual. Like the melters, many had stayed on after the evening shift to see the first heat tapped.

Only now did Gayevoi approach the shop manager. Stopping beside him on the stairs to the teeming bay, he asked:

"Well, how is it? Success?"

"It should be," Krainev replied. "I kept strictly to calculations. But just the same, I'm waiting anxiously for the final test sheet. You know, Grigori Andreyevich—aside from science, in this job, a lot depends on skill and experience."

"Which you seem to have in good measure," said Gayevoi.

"What makes you think so?"

"You keep so cool."

Krainev smiled.

"You always seem cool too," he said. "Only I put no great faith in that. Coldness comes with indifference. With you, it's pure self-control." He

glanced at Gayevoi's temples, where the thick black hair was lightly streaked with silver. "Nobody can top a furnace coolly. Down in your heart, you're always worried."

And, as though ashamed of this sudden confession, he turned away to watch the steel, now mounting slowly in the moulds.

When the tanning was done, they went to the laboratory, where the fate of the steel was being determined. Gayevoi stood smoking silently, watching the laboratory assistants, who were working with unwonted haste. Even Karevskaya, the laboratory manager, usually quiet and slow-moving, hurried about in evident anxiety. Krainev watched tensely, noting every change in colour of the solutions in the different retorts. One, of a light shade of violet, caught his attention for a moment.

"Why so little manganese?" he wondered, alarmed.

But, as he soon saw, the solution was gradually darkening. He breathed more freely. Another solution, faintly tinged with yellow, indicated low phosphorus content. Pointing it out to Gayevoi, he said, with a pleased smile:

"The less of that, the better."

The rest, however, was not so simple. The green of the nickel solution, the orange of the

chromium, gave him no clue, for he had seldom had to do with either of these elements. He would have to wait for the final results. How painfully the minutes dragged!

"Eight elements instead of the usual four. It's enough to drive you mad, waiting for them to finish," he whispered. Gayevoi smiled understandingly.

Skatilov came in, throwing a wary glance at Karevskaya, who was always implacable in expelling the curious from her "holy of holies." Melter Nikitenko edged in behind the foreman, turning on the mistress of the laboratory eyes full of half-humorous pleading. Dropping his work mitts to the floor by the wall, he sat down on them to wait. Then Lutsenko pushed in, throwing the door wide open, with a grim expression that was meant to say: "Just try and drive me out!"

Soon other melters appeared, drawn by the common interest in the new armour steel.

Karevskaya tried not to notice them. She moved from bench to bench, checking on the work of her assistants, sharing in full measure the general anxiety for the fate of the heat. The waiting workers began to talk among themselves, very quietly at first, but later as test after test was completed—with perceptibly in-

creasing animation. At length, only one figure remained to be determined—the chromium content.

As time passed, pungent makhorka smoke began to mingle with the acid fumes of the reagents.

Karevskaya puckered up her nose disgustedly, but said nothing.

Krainev's eyes were glittering. He said something to Gayevoi, in a half whisper, and laughed. Opanasenko and Lyutov came in. They had been preparing the furnace for the next heat.

"Sergei Petrovich," said Karevskaya faintly, "the heat is spoiled. The chromium is low."

All eyes turned to Krainev. In Shatilov's, he read fright; in Opanasenko's, reproach; in Lutsenko's, sullen gloom.

"There's specifications for you!" Lyutov said, with heavy malice.

"What have the specifications got to do with it?" Krainev returned sharply. "The specifications provide for the final result. It's a question of calculations, and those are mine."

Turning to Karevskaya, he requested:

"Check the test again, please—yourself! It can't be right."

"Very well. I'll make another check." Karevskaya replied; but her expression, as she turned

to the analytical balance, seemed to indicate greater faith in her assistants' work than in the engineer's calculations.

Another hour of waiting lay ahead.

Laying a hand on Gayevoi's shoulder, Krainev said:

"Come along. We've another furnace to prepare for tapping."

"Another furnace?" asked Gayevoi, greatly surprised. "How's that? You only had orders for one, so far."

"Yes, that's so. But I look at it differently. I was supposed to tap fourteen heats in ten days, but I started four days late. One furnace won't fill the assignment. Two will."

"You should have let the director know what you had in mind," said Gayevoi reproachfully. "It would have made him a little easier. After all, he's just as anxious as any of us."

"I believe in getting results before I talk about them," Krainev returned. "At least one heat," he added, with an expectant glance in the direction of the laboratory.

"To make this steel right is no great merit," he was thinking; "but to fall down on making it--that's a disgrace."

"A disgrace!" he said aloud, turning sharply away. Gayevoi glanced at him anxiously, and,

thinking to divert his mind, began to talk about the latest reports from the front.

"The front," reflected Krainev bitterly. "The front needs armour plate, and I give it scrap."

The conversation flagged. Both were too depressed to talk.

"It's the first heat," Gayevoi told himself, seeking some justification for the shop manager. "All sorts of little things may have gone wrong. It sometimes takes weeks to master grades of steel that are less complex than this. Only why did he have to shoulder all the responsibility himself? After all, there's the chief engineer, and the engineering department. They could have helped. Is it vanity -wanting to hog all the glory? No. It's not that. Simply, confidence in himself and in his workers. But just the same, the results..." And Gayevoi cursed himself for his failure to summon Makarov while the steel was still in the furnace.

"I'll call him in for the second heat, at least," he decided, and made for the nearest telephone.

The director appeared beside No. 1 furnace, followed by the chief engineer. Makarov, gesticulating heatedly, seemed to be urging something on the director; but Dubenko only waved him

off impatiently and strode on along the charging level to where Krainev was standing.

Sergei Petrovich had the impulse to turn on his heel and leave. Controlling himself however, with some effort, he remained where he was.

"Here goes," he thought.

Coming up to him, Dubenko stopped abruptly. Only the presence of the workers, it was evident, restrained the director from a violent outburst of indignation.

The laboratory door flew open, and Shatilov came running out along the charging level.

"Sergei Petrovich," he cried. "It's all right! The chromium's all right! They checked it. The first test was wrong!"

Makarov glanced at the director.

Dubenko extended a hand to Krainev.

"Congratulations," he said.

"I'm preparing another heat for tapping." Krainev reported, wondering how the director would receive his announcement.

Dubenko laughed.

"So I see," he said. "I'm not blind."

The melters came thronging noisily out of the laboratory. Then Karevskaya appeared, beaming with pleasure, flourishing the laboratory certificate of the first heat.

And from that day on a new type of steel flowed from the open-hearth furnaces.

In place of the noisy, rimming, effervescent mass that rushed down the spout when ordinary steel was made, the ladles received a thick, quiet, high-quality metal, designed for armour plate.

CHAPTER TWO

Coming into the laboratory, early one morning, Krainev learned that No. 3 furnace had turned out a heat which was not up to specifications. His lips set in a grim line. This was the second failure since his shop had begun to work on the defence assignment.

As always, Krainev began the day by making an unhurried tour of the shop. Pausing at the furnaces, he pointed out, here excessive draft, there a pile of rubbish on the charging level. He checked the readings of the recording instruments, and made several notes in his memorandum book. Only when this was done did he set out for the record room to receive the report of the night shift.

Before the war, the workers had never gathered for the report immediately upon the whistle. It had been the custom to come in a quarter

of an hour later, after turning over unhurriedly to the incoming shift, washing up, and getting into town clothes. Now things were different. The moment the shift was over, people hastened to the record room to hear the radio broadcast of the latest news from the front. Latecomers, angrily motioned into silence, would stop guiltily just inside the door, afraid to move lest they miss a word of the communiqué.

Today, there was a report on the losses of the German fascist troops in six weeks of battle.

"A good job, all that scum done away with!" said Nikitenko, raising a hand to smooth back his scorched hair. "But they keep pushing and pushing, the devils, on Smolensk, and Uman, and Belaya Tserkov. When are we going to stop them?"

"If we start making steel like No. 3 last night," Lutsenko muttered glumly, "we won't have anything to stop them with."

Nikitenko was about to reply; but the door opened, and the shop manager came in.

An unwonted hush fell in the room. Looking from face to face, Krainev understood that all the men knew of the rejected heat.

"It's a dear foreman you've turned out to be," he said sternly to Shatilov, who sat among his comrades with hanging head and lowered

eyes. "A very dear foreman. A nice lot of money you're costing the works. Again your steel has to be scrapped."

"Sergei Petrovich," Shatilov began: but Krainev interrupted.

"You're a tankman, Shatilov. You and I we ought to be at the front, but we're kept here instead to make steel, tank steel. And what do we do? Six tanks could have been armoured out of that heat. Do you know where the trouble lies?"

"Yes. I took over from Lyulov in bad shape."

"For the second time!"

"For the second time, Sergei Petrovich."

For a moment Krainev did not speak, making an effort to restrain his rising anger. Repetition of mistakes was a thing he could never forgive, in himself or in others. At length, he said:

"Did you have orders from me not to take over from any foreman if the heat hadn't been conducted properly? Is that right?"

"That's right, Sergei Petrovich. It's my fault."

"Then why the devil don't you carry out your orders?" Krainev shouted. "Who gave you permission to spoil steel? 'That's right, Sergei Petrovich. It's my fault, Sergei Petrovich.' I know my name's Sergei Petrovich. Once you take

over a heat, it's your responsibility. Why did you do it?"

"What else could I do? Lyutov's an experienced foreman. It's sort of awkward to say anything."

"Ah, so it's awkward to say anything to Lyutov. But it isn't awkward, I suppose, to spoil a heat! It isn't awkward to let down the works! To let down the front!"

On the last word, Krainev almost choked with indignation.

The door swung open, admitting a girl in a white beret. She paused in the doorway, brushing back a lock of chestnut hair that had slipped onto her forehead. The strained silence in the room told her that the report this morning was not an ordinary one. She glanced at the shop manager, then at the foreman, trying to guess what had gone wrong.

"Comrade Teplova," said Krainev, turning to the girl. "draw up an order for foreman Shatilov's removal, and have the artist make a placard: 'Shame! Foreman Shatilov spoiled two heats!'"

Leaving the record room, Krainev walked slowly to the teeming bay. The ingots of rejected steel were cooling in the teeming box of No. 3. Their clear-cut outlines and splendid sur-

face renewed his bitter chagrin. A trille—a few thousandths of one per cent of phosphorus above the limit—and ten hours of intensive labour thrown to the winds.

Above all, however, he blamed himself.

"It shows I've been a poor teacher," he said aloud. "Too lenient."

To him, the foreman's error was his own.

For some minutes after Krainev had left, a heavy silence hung in the record room. The first to break it was Lutsenko, a veteran melter who had retired on pension some years before, but had returned to work when the war began.

"Time and again I've warned you, Shatilov," he said glumly. "not to give Lyutov any leeway, taking over after his shift. And what do you do? 'Yes, Nikolai Ivanovich, if you please, Nikolai Ivanovich.' A nice job you take over from Nikolai Ivanovich! When he's going to tap the heat himself, he runs everything just so; but if he sees it won't be tapped in his shift, he's sure to play some dirty trick. And you take the consequences!"

"It's the worst thing, coming on after Lyutov," said Sasha, a young furnace helper, come to the works from a steelmen's trade school. He spoke very loud, with an angry spark in the lively eyes he turned to the foreman.

"What do you know about it?" someone asked from a far corner.

"Maybe I don't know too much with my head," Sasha returned. "But my back knows, well enough. I can't straighten up till next day, with all the limestone I have to dump in the furnace, when we take over after Lyutov."

"A fine job: six tanks off the plan, a hundred rubles of bonus lost, and tons of material wasted it won't be remelted so soon! Brought shame on ourselves, and lost our foreman, and made a hole in our own pay," said Nikitenko, his eyes fixed mournfully on the floor.

"Shatilov!" said Matviyenko. "Remember what Gayevoi said at the last meeting? 'Sometimes you let one man off easy, and it works out against all the rest.'"

"Ah, you can all go to hell!" exclaimed Shatilov, who had been listening in silence all this time. "As if it wasn't enough to get it from the manager, you all have to jump on me too." And he left the room, banging the door.

"Can't take it, can you?" Nikitenko shouted after him. He also left the room. The others followed.

Teplova was left alone. For a while she sat motionless, deep in thought. Then, seizing the furnace journals, she began leafing them hur-

riedly, copying out long columns of figures. And as the columns grew, her face became very grave.

The telephone rang. It was Krainev, reminding her that he must have the data on the work of the shop for the past twenty-four hours. By the time she brought him the required material, there was no more than twenty minutes left before the general morning report in the director's office. Krainev glanced reproachfully at the clock. Teplova apologized, explaining that she had been unavoidably detained.

Sergei Petrovich began to look through the material she had brought him. He was always pleasantly surprised by the care and thoroughness with which these daily summaries were drawn up. Besides the essential output figures, they contained a wealth of supplementary information on the work of men and furnaces: quota fulfilment, expenditure of raw materials, and duration of the different processes, by crews and shifts. A special account was conducted for each foreman, indicating every heat tapped since the beginning of the year. In the plant where Krainev had worked before, detailed summaries had been drawn up only once a month. Here, as a result of the thorough accounting system Teplova had instituted, this data was available daily. And, having such precise and up-

to-date information always at his fingertips, the manager of the open-hearth shop invariably came out the victor in arguments with the transport, supply, and power departments during the daily general reports. How the girl managed it was hard to understand.

This morning, the summary was far from exhaustive. But Krainev had very little time, and could only glance through it hastily.

"It wasn't Shatilov's fault," Teplova said suddenly.

Krainev looked at her in surprise.

"And what makes you stand up for him?" he demanded sharply.

"You see, Sergei Petrovich, Shatilov is new as a foreman. He's a member of the Comsomol, and...."

"As secretary of the shop Comsomol unit, you'd be doing better to see that Comsomol members don't spoil steel," Krainev put in.

"That's just what I'm trying to do, Sergei Petrovich. Let me ask you one question: whom do you count the best foreman in the shop?"

"Lyutov, of course," he replied impatiently, glancing again at the clock. He had very little time to spare.

"I stayed in the record room today, after you reprimanded Shatilov," Teplova began hur-

riedly, "and I heard what the others had to say. They had it in for Shatilov, well enough; but they cursed Lyulov, too, for the way he turns over his heats to the next shift. I decided to make a check. And it's true. All the heats Lyulov taps come out perfectly right. But both rejected heats came out of furnaces that Lyulov had started and handed on to the next shift. And another thing. Even when the heats he hands on come out right, they drag out longer than the usual time. Here's the data." And she showed Krainev the material she had been working over all morning.

The conclusions indicated were unexpected, and Krainev sat for some time, thinking over them. The telephone rang, reminding him that he was late. Thrusting Teplova's materials into his pocket, he hurried to the director's office.

The report had already begun, and he had to ask permission to enter. When he came in the manager of the blast furnace shop, his report delivered, was lighting a cigarette, and Nechayev was reporting on the work of the rolling mills. Dubenko paced restlessly up and down, his hands behind his back. His lean, nervous face expressed displeasure. One eye was screwed up, and the other eyebrow raised -- a bad sign.

"Another heat spoiled," he exclaimed, interrupting Krainev, when the latter began the usual report on the work of his shop. "Remove the foreman, and put him on some other job!"

A lengthy tirade followed. Dubenko said more or less the same things Krainev himself had said to Shatilov: but he put them at greater length, and in sharper terms. Krainev felt a growing irritation. He would have preferred the sternest reprimand, were it only brief and to the point, to this protracted "sawmill," as he called the director's moralizings. It was beyond endurance. Finally, he broke out:

"There's no need to tell me all that, Pyotr Ivanovich. I know it perfectly well, and I'll do everything necessary. But I'm not going to remove Shatilov."

"You'll remove him immediately."

"I won't, Pyotr Ivanovich, because..."

"Then I will," declared Dubenko, ignoring Krainev's explanations.

"You won't, when you realize..."

Dubenko pressed a finger down on the bell, and kept it there. When the surprised secretary came hurrying in, Dubenko dictated to him an order demoting Shatilov from foreman to melter. Krainev got up and left the room. He knew that this was not the thing to do, but he

could no longer control his irritation. The others stared after him, and Gayevoi shrugged disapprovingly. Dubenko, however, was not disturbed. He knew his open-hearth shop manager well. Himself, Dubenko would flare up as suddenly as gunpowder, often for trifling reasons. Krainev, on the other hand, would explode only after long internal seething; and, once his anger had found outlet, would quickly regain control.

And so it was on this occasion. Exasperated by the director's peremptory decision, Krainev left the room, lest his tongue get the better of him. He smoked a cigarette or two, then telephoned the shop and had a talk with the foreman. When he felt that he could keep himself in hand, he returned to the director's office. Dubenko glanced significantly at Gayevoi, as though to say, "There! It's all over." The report continued as usual. In conclusion, Senin, the manager of the transportation department, announced the number of carloads of armour plate despatched.

When the report was over, Krainev spent some time in the shop, and then returned to his office. The order for Shatilov's demotion would not be posted until the next day, and Krainev was in no hurry to renew his argument with Dubenko. The director was stubborn. Until he had reached decision, he was open to argument; afterwards, he

was impervious to the most well-founded appeal. Moreover, Dubenko thought very highly of Lyutov, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to convince him that Lyutov was to blame for Shatilov's failure. Nor could Krainev himself go any further without a thorough check on Teplova's conclusions. With this in mind, he looked attentively through the furnace journals.

"Suppose I send for Lyutov and talk it over with him frankly," he thought, as he laid the journals aside; but he at once abandoned this idea. Lyutov was an arrogant and overweening man. Holding first place in the shop, he considered himself infallible, and would never admit a mistake.

Then, suddenly, a very simple solution occurred to Krainev. Lyutov must be compelled to take over from himself: to work on after his shift, and carry to completion a heat he had been expecting to turn over to the foreman of the next shift. That would demonstrate, not only to Lyutov and to all the workers, but, still more important, to the director, how dishonestly Lyutov worked.

"And suppose even that fails to convince Dubenko?" Krainev asked himself, pacing uneasily up and down the room. A moment later, he was hurrying towards the office of the shop Party bureau.

He found Teplova there, explaining something to Matviyenko with great feeling and conviction. Matviyenko seemed absorbed in a list of figures that lay before him, on a sheet of paper torn from a memorandum pad. His heavy eyelids drooped, giving his face an expression of extreme fatigue.

"So you're removing Shatilov, comrade manager?" he asked, lifting stern, thoughtful eyes to Krainev.

Sergei Petrovich told him what had happened at the general report. Matviyenko frowned. He knew the director's temper.

"Still, I'm not intending to remove Shatilov," Krainev declared, and went on to explain his plan.

Matviyenko thought awhile.

"You're right, Sergei Petrovich," he said finally. "The Party organization will back you."

"That's just what I came to see you about," said Krainev, relieved.

"It's all my fault," Teplova put in. "It was my figures on Lyutov's work that gave him his reputation. I didn't take into account the change of shifts."

"No, no, Valentina Ivanovna," Krainev returned. "It was my job to see into that. I should have realized sooner how things stood. Only we've

had so few failures, up to now, that I've never really looked into them properly."

Coming home that evening, Krainev found his apartment empty. There was a note tacked to the door: "Vadim is upstairs." Sergei Petrovich went up to the next floor, and rang the Makarovs' bell.

The door was opened by Elena Makarova, the chief engineer's wife. Two little boys--Krainev's son, Vadim, and his playmate, Victor Makarov--came running after her, and Krainev lifted them both to kiss.

"Has Vasya telephoned?" he asked. "Will he soon be home?"

Elena shook her head.

"Trina's away again...."

"Yes, she's gone out," Elena said, deliberately disregarding the tone of his "again." Then, abruptly changing the subject, she asked:

"Has something gone wrong at the shop?"

"How do you know?" Krainev demanded, somewhat taken aback. "Vasya's not home, and he wouldn't talk about such things over the phone."

Elena smiled.

"We wives always know, the minute we see you. Sometimes, even, before we see you, by the way your feet sound on the stairs. When all's

well, Vasya never seems tired. His step is so light! But when there's trouble, he walks differently, and his voice is different, too—duller."

Sergei Petrovich turned his eyes away. The tone of his voice, the weight of his footsteps—whom had they ever interested? Elena, reading his thoughts, wished she had been more careful.

There was an awkward pause.

"Well, I'll be going," he said, beckoning to Vadim.

"Don't go, Sergei Petrovich!" pleaded Elena, seizing his arm. "Stay and have dinner with us. Please!"

"No, thank you," he replied determinedly. "I'll have my dinner at home." And again he turned away his eyes.

"Well, then, be sure you don't give any of it to Vadim." Elena warned him, when she had made sure he was not angry. "He and Victor just had a contest to see which could eat the most."

"Who won? Victor?" asked Sergei Petrovich, smiling.

"Nobody! Nobody!" the boys cried rapturously.

"I interfered," Elena explained. "I saw they were simply gorging, so I stopped supplies. Stubborn as their fathers, both of them—they'd sooner burst than own themselves beaten."

"Why is everything so different with the Makarovs?" Sergei Petrovich wondered, as he went down the stairs to his own apartment. "Elena takes such an interest in the works, and in her husband's problems. After all, she has interests of her own, too, no less than anybody. She's studying English, and she does a lot of reading. Perhaps I don't try hard enough to interest Lina in my work. . . . No, that's not so. I've done my best, and never got an ounce of sympathy. I've worried over her problems, but she never has over mine. Never. I wonder why?"

In the kitchen, he found a cold dinner. But there was no bread. He ate a few slices of cheese, with some vanilla rusks that were lying in the bread box, and lay down on the couch.

Vadim immediately scrambled up beside him. The boy was always eager for these rare moments when he could take possession of his father and shower him with questions. Before the war, the evening hours had always been transformed into "question and answer parties," as Sergei Petrovich called them. But everything was different now.

"Well, sonny, and what did you and Victor play at today?" the father asked.

Listening to the child's happy prattle, however, he repeatedly caught himself napping.

Then, noticing how his father's eyelids drooped, Vadim grew still. Sergei Petrovich fell asleep, and the boy dozed off beside him.

They were both awakened by the telephone. Opanasenko was calling, from the shop. He asked permission to send for a foreman to relieve Lyutov. Sergei Petrovich forbade him to do so.

A few minutes later, Lyutov telephoned himself, complaining that he was tired and asking to be relieved, as his shift was over.

"You can hold out till morning. It's harder in the trenches," Krainev answered sharply, and hung up the receiver.

Vadim was half asleep on the couch. Sergei Petrovich lifted him tenderly and carried him to bed.

Lyutov was compelled to work on through the night shift. He tried the first-aid centre, but the doctor found nothing wrong with him and refused to give him a release. Nothing remained but to return to the shop and get to work. In No. 3 and No. 5 furnaces, where the slag had been skimmed in his shift, the phosphorus content was slowly but steadily rising. Lyutov rushed madly from one furnace to the other. He tried to skim the slag again, but it was too late: the slag brought the metal with it.

Melter Nikitenko watched Lyutov's every move. He was very sorry about the metal, but glad to see Lyutov exposed. Coming up close, he looked mockingly into the foreman's flustered face and asked:

"Well, comrade foreman—got stuck in your own muck, eh?"

When Lyutov, growing desperate, began to shout and curse, Nikitenko broke in sharply:

"Hold your noise. What are we going to do about the phosphorus? Curses won't bring it down."

Lyutov seemed to shrink into himself.

"Oh, well, Comrade Nikitenko," he said ingratiatingly, "the steel can go for roofing."

"Nothing doing!" thundered Nikitenko. "Last night we ruined our steel, all on account of you, and lost our foreman, too, and now you think we're going to do it again? In the Comsomol furnace? I suppose you'll drag the molybdenum out with a rake—eh?"

"After all, the steel won't go to waste." Lyutov tried to urge. "It'll simply be used for something else."

"Nothing doing!" Nikitenko shouted again. "I won't tap the furnace till the steel is right, if we have to stay here till this time tomorrow! Clever, aren't you—used for something else! Any

steel that can't help the front is that much steel gone to waste. Dump in some more hot metal, and start all over."

"Are you crazy, Nikitenko? We'll overload the furnace, and put it out of commission. They'll throw us out of the works for that."

"And serve us right if they do. Only that would be too soft. Spoilers ought to be shot."

And Nikitenko hurried away, to persuade shift manager Bondarev to allow an additional charge of hot metal.

The furnace was loaded to the limit, and the process recommenced. When ore was added, slag came pouring out through all the doors and flooded the whole charging level. The sweating crew cleared it away by hand. Lyutov cursed furiously, fearing that the metal would burn through the sill and come rushing out after the slag. Should that happen, the furnace would be doomed to a protracted stoppage.

Sasha, moving away for a moment's respite, paused beside Lyutov.

"Bad bees, bad honey," he said loudly, brushing the streaming sweat away from his eyes.

Lyutov clenched his teeth, but said nothing.

Lutsenko came up slowly from No. 5, and watched the bustling foreman for a while, shaking his head.

"What about mine—are we going to tap it tonight, or what?" he demanded finally, pulling Lyutov towards his furnace.

The metal from No. 5 was cast for roofing. At No. 3, however, Nikitenko refused to tap the heat until its quality was assured. The foreman, thoroughly subdued, obediently followed the orders of the angry melter.

When Teplova came into the record room next morning, she found the shop manager at the desk, staring at Lyutov as though he had never seen the man before. Lyutov, red as a boiled lobster, was mopping perspiration from his cheeks and forehead, with a look of mingled guilt and bewilderment in his shifty eyes.

The door opened, and Dubenko strode in. Learning of the failure of No. 5, he had hastened immediately to the shop.

The daily report began. And in the course of this report, which developed gradually into a general meeting, all Lyutov's old sins were recalled: his intrigues against other workers; his efforts to bring his own shift to the fore, not by honest work, but by methods working to the detriment of the shop as a whole; his toadying to Valsky, the former shop manager, and the debauchery for which he had been expelled from the Party.

CHAPTER THREE

By night, the town melted into darkness, merged with the earth. Only over the blacked-out works did a red glow rise from time to time. Every tapping of iron or steel would lift the sheltering mask of darkness from the works, and with it from the town.

"You can't hide the sun," Krainev reflected, approaching the open-hearth shop. The building seemed to house a conflagration. Every chink, every opening in the roof, even the tiniest, sent out bright searchlight rays into the night. Krainev watched them with troubled eyes. While only the ordinary operations were in progress, the shop remained invisible; but the tapping of the furnaces was not to be concealed.

He went inside. Encased in sheet iron from ground to roof, the shop had become very stuffy. Only opposite the furnaces was there a current of cool night air, pumped in by powerful ventilators.

Krainev glanced down into the teeming bay. Newly filled moulds glowed, scarlet rectangles, in the darkness below.

Standing there on the charging level, he recalled the past few days: Lyutov's exposure; the melters' angry faces; Dubenko, promptly rescind-

ing the order for Shatilov's demotion; the happiness in Shatilov's eyes. He recalled other eyes—Valya Teplova's, warm and friendly; and, somehow, life assumed a brighter aspect.

Krainev's reflections were interrupted by a shrill, warning blast of the works whistle. Before he could collect his thoughts, a violent explosion sounded. A second followed, and a third. After a brief pause, a fourth explosion, still more violent, rocked the whole building. Hundreds of bomb splinters rattled against the roof, tore at the iron-sheathed walls, clattered down on the iron floor plates of the charging level. Somebody screamed.

For a fraction of an instant, stinging fear glued Krainev to one of the pillars supporting the roof. But he broke immediately away, and ran down the level towards No. 1 furnace. The workers had gathered here, just inside the shop entrance. Krainev was about to order them to leave for the slit trenches, when suddenly a rapid, multiple rat-tat-tat began overhead, as though someone were emptying a sack of peas onto the roof. An enemy plane was strafing the building. Death-bearing lines of light—tracer machine-gun bullets—pierced the roof, and ricocheted from the charging level. Metal struck coldly against metal.

"Get under the level!" Krainev shouted, realizing that the thick plates offered reliable shelter against bullets and bomb splinters.

As suddenly as it had begun, the bombing ended. Whistle and sirens soon blew the all clear, and the crews quickly gathered at their furnaces.

The enemy was still far removed; but the war had already burst into the town. At first a distant menace, threatening the threshold of the nation, it stood today at the threshold of every home. More, it had entered every home. The short hours of uneasy sleep were broken by incessant alerts. Systematic bombings made work almost impossible. To people's growing anxiety for the fate of the country, for the lot of the thousands of men, women, children left in towns and villages seized by the enemy, was added an unrelenting concern for their own works, their own families, their own lives.

Particularly difficult was the work of the open-hearth shop. Several times every night, the men would have to leave the shop for the slit trenches. The gas would be turned low, and the metal would cool in the furnaces. After the all clear, it would be reheated, only to cool again during the next alert. It would take all day to bring the night's work to rights; and as soon as dark-

ness felt the same thing would begin again. For several days on end, the shop gave no production.

When the alert sounded, and Irina, wrapping a blanket hastily around Vadim, ran off to the shelter with the sleepy child, Krainev would hurry straight to the shop. He would find it dark and hushed. Only the shift manager, the foremen, and the melters were obliged to remain at the furnaces, with two bricklayers in case of emergency. But Matviyenko, calm and steady, would invariably appear. Then Teplova would arrive, and then the shop mechanic, looking grimmer with every raid.

At first Sergei Petrovich remonstrated with them, and tried repeatedly, without success, to drive them home. In the end, however, he gave up these fruitless efforts. In the depths of his heart, he was pleased to have these three in the shop during alerts. Despite the black blinds, the record room seemed bright and cozy. They would all smoke, even Teplova. Matviyenko brought to these "parties," as he called their nightly gatherings, a spirit of drollery and friendly teasing. When danger was close, the power station would turn off all lights, and only the glowing cigarettes would relieve the darkness in the room.

Krainev was oppressed by a sense of his own

helplessness, his inability to offer active resistance to the enemy.

One night, entering the shop during an alert, he was surprised to hear loud laughter. A narrow strip of light, coming through one of the furnace doors, faintly outlined a group of people on the charging level. Coming closer, he recognized the crew of the Comsomol furnace, and, towering above their youthful figures, a huge, mustached teemer, whose deep, rolling laugh drowned out all other voices. Krainev stopped to listen.

"I was down in the slit trench, waiting for the all clear," said Sasha, when the laughter had subsided, "and all of a sudden I heard some woman yelling up at the entrance: 'Ksenya, Ksenya, are you there?' Well, of course, everyone started asking—which Ksenya? There's lots of girls named Ksenya. And then she said: 'Oh, good Lord, Ksenofont Petrovich, he jumped right out of the bathtub and forgot to put his coat on!' Only, don't you see, he had his coat on, all right, her darling Ksenya. It wasn't his coat he forgot. He was sitting in there on the wet clay without any pants on."

Again a burst of laughter interrupted Sasha's story, and he laughed with the rest.

Krainev, in the distance, could not help but smile.

"So then we all knew which Ksenya she was looking for," Sasha continued. "It was old Valsky, Ksenofont Petrovich. And everybody in that trench was just about rolling on the floor. It was something awful! Petro, from No. 5, gasped out, 'Oh, my poor sides!' and started crawling out of the trench on all fours. Well, and the rest of us followed him. You know yourselves, when a fellow's feeling jolly, there's nothing on earth can scare him."

"And is that why you're not in the trench, where you belong?" Krainev demanded, coming up to them, with a hand to his lips to hide his smile.

"How can we leave the furnace, with the heat all ready?" returned Shatilov. "We were just going to tap it when the alert sounded. If the raid doesn't drag out too long, we can tap right after the all clear, as soon as the power comes on."

"Won't it cool?" Krainev asked. Getting out his blue glass, he looked in at the peephole.

"No, Sergei Petrovich, it won't cool," Nikitenko told him cheerfully. "We're keeping the gas up well, with some extra draft to keep the flame short, so nothing will show through the smokestack. We've got a watcher up on the roof, keeping his eye on the stack, so we can be sure that's all right."

"And what's 'Daddy' doing here with you?" Krainev asked, referring to the big teemer by his shop nickname.

"Why, they haven't got a teemer in their crew," Daddy returned. "They're learning fast enough. They've got a Comsomol melter, and a Comsomol foreman, too. Only when it comes to teeming, they have to send for me."

Shatilov was violating the air defence regulations. As the work of the furnace did not expose the building, however, the risk seemed permissible.

"All right, we'll make a try. I'll be here for the tapping," Krainev said, and moved away to the next furnace.

No, it had also been ready for tapping when the alert was sounded: but the gas had been shut off, and the steel was rapidly cooling.

The Comsomol furnace was tapped twenty minutes after the all clear. The remaining furnaces dragged out their heats until the morning.

Coming into the record room after the teeming, Krainev found a complete "quorum"—Matviyenko's name for gatherings of the shop authorities—assembled there.

Sergei Petrovich immediately telephoned headquarters to report the state of affairs in the shop.

Then he called his home, and waited anxiously until, at last, Vadim's voice sounded in the receiver.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"All right, daddy. They missed us again," the boy replied. He was firmly convinced that their home was the prime target of the German flyers.

As Sergei Petrovich, greatly relieved, hung up the receiver, Teplova said:

"We ought to get the rest of the workers to back up the Comsomol crew, and stay on the job during air raids. Otherwise we'll never get anything done."

Matviyenko glanced at Krainev, with a barely perceptible smile. He liked the proposal. But Valya thought the Party secretary was laughing at her.

"Why not?" she demanded hotly. "Why not? Out at the front, do they leave the trenches when they're bombed? Of course not! So why should we? Aren't we working for the front?"

"The workers will be willing," said Matviyenko confidently. "It's the authorities we may find it hard to convince. It's against the air defence regulations, don't forget."

Telephoning the works Party committee, he requested Gayevoi to come to the shop.

Dubenko came in, on his customary round of the shops after air raids. Soon after, Gayevoi appeared.

"We can't ask the workers to stay in the shop during raids," Matviyenko said, with an enquiring glance at the director. "But if they stay of their own will, I think we can take the risk. I'm sure Pyotr Ivanovich will approve."

After a little thought, Dubenko agreed, adding, however, that he would refer this decision to the People's Commissar for confirmation.

When morning came, placards appeared in the shop and at the works gates, proclaiming:

"Three cheers for the Comsomol patriots! Foreman Shatilov's crew stayed at their furnace through the alert and kept it running normally!"

The following night there were several alerts, but not a single worker left the shop. Even old Pakhomich, busily lining a spout, only grunted and grumbled a bit, with an uneasy upward glance, and then went on with his work.

Shatilov's crew soon had followers in the other shops as well; and it was not long before all the iron and steel works in the Donbas were working steadily, in spite of enemy planes.

Blast and open-hearth furnaces worked with slightly bated breath; rolling mills, at full speed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Early one August morning, the works locomotive pulled up to the trestle of the blast furnace shop a long train of fifty-ton freight cars which had been camouflaged with greenery. Fresh saplings, nailed to the car walls on either side, created the appearance of a shady lane. Krainev, coming past, stopped short in amazement. The sight brought memories of childhood, and Trinity Sunday, with its green garlands indoors and out—garlands even on the railway engines passing by his town.

Yet in the same instant his heart contracted painfully. Could this gay greenery offer protection against the fascist vultures now savagely bombing every road that led to the Donbas?

During the general report, Dubenko announced an expected increase in arriving freight. Several trainloads of ore from the Urals were approaching the town.

All day, Krainev was haunted by that green lane of saplings.

At lunch in the club, the talk was rather subdued.

"I'm beginning to worry about the Donbas," said Valsky—former manager of the open-hearth

shop, now employed in the engineering department.

"There's no ground for worry," returned Ne-chayev, across the table. "Of course, I'm no strategist, but I should say we'll stop the Germans along the Dnieper."

"Yes, I'm beginning to worry," Valsky repeated obstinately. "The Donbas is the key to the Soviet Union. If we leave it, we can't hope to keep the rest."

"You're rather quick about selecting keys," said Makarov acidly. "Whether you're worried or not, I can't tell, of course. But one thing I can tell you plainly: you've picked the wrong key."

Krainev, who had been listening in silence, pointed to the map of the Soviet Union hanging on the wall.

"The Germans will drown in it," he said.

"They won't drown themselves. We'll drown them." Makarov returned. And, turning back to Valsky, he continued: "You listen to me, Ksenofont Petrovich. Drop that talk about the Donbas and the Soviet Union. It's pure drivel."

Later, returning to the works with Krainev, Makarov remarked:

"He's a strange sort, Valsky. Muddy. Like that name they call him: 'Beast number five.'"

"Why 'number five'?" asked Krainev, staring.

And Makarov, evidently surprised at his friend's ignorance, told him how the nickname had originated.

When the state loan was announced, shortly after his transfer to the engineering department, Valsky had made up his mind to subscribe as little as possible. He had waited patiently until the rally was over and almost everyone had left the hall. Then, coming up to the subscription table, he had named a sum equal to about half his monthly salary. Standing there silently, he had heard out persuasion and remonstrances, nodding his head as though in full agreement; but when it came to signing, had again repeated the original sum.

Darya Vasilyevna, an elderly cleaning woman, retired on pension after many years of work in the open-hearth shop, and now employed in the administration building, had stood for a long time quietly watching this scene.

In the end, however, her patience had given out. Coming up to Valsky, she had said:

"Now, aren't you ashamed, Ksenofont Petrovich? I signed up for a whole month's pay. Why can't you? You've got a house of your own, and no end of beasts and goods. There's the cow—number one, and the calf—number two,

and the ewe—number three, and the sow—number four. And yourself, besides—beast number five!”

“And ever since,” Makarov concluded, “Val-sky’s been known in the plant as ‘beast number five.’”

An extermination detachment swung down the road, returning from target practice after the night shift. Foreman Shatilov, commander of one of the rifle platoons, turned over his platoon to a squad commander and strode briskly up to Krainev to report on the results of the morning’s shooting. He felt that the detachment had made an excellent showing. But Sergei Petrovich, who during his term of military service had been the best hunter and marksman in his border unit, evinced no great enthusiasm.

“Not bad for a beginning, comrade commander,” he said, looking straight into Shatilov’s eyes, “but not enough. We must have as many trained men as possible, and fast. Time presses.”

“Anything new from the front?” asked Shatilov anxiously.

“Not today. But take a look over there.”

A leafy lane was moving past—the second camouflaged train that day. It differed greatly from the first. The foliage was dusty, with

branches missing here and there. The cars were damaged, and the fine Krivoi Rog ore was sifting out through bullet holes in the sides. Shatilov bit his lip.

The yard outside the open-hearth shop was small and crowded. Before the war Krainev had found this very annoying. Today, he looked about him with entirely different feelings. That pile of ingots would afford a good position for a rifle squad, and the big iron ladle over there, with the chipped edge, could very well shelter a heavy machine gun. He clearly envisioned a scene of battle on the works territory.

Entering the shop, Krainev found the crews of No. 3 and No. 4, which had just been tapped, energetically putting their furnaces to rights. The melters themselves had seized scoops, and were working so fast that their crews could barely keep up with them. The heap of dolomite by No. 3 was rapidly disappearing.

And Krainev was at once absorbed by the accustomed daily tasks. Once inside the shop, he always forgot everything but his work.

It was not long, however, before his peace of mind was again disturbed. Teplova and Matviyenko returned from the hospital, where they had gone to visit two workers wounded during the night's bombing. One, an elderly teemer, was in

grave danger. A bomb splinter had pierced his intestines, and, after a protracted operation, he was still unconscious. The other, furnace helper Sasha, of Nikitenko's crew, had quickly recovered from a slight concussion, and the doctors had allowed him to go home.

Teplova's eyes were red. Noticing Krainev's glance, she said simply, confirming his unspoken thought:

"Yes, I've been crying, Sergei Petrovich. It's worse there than it is here. Wives and children, all brokenhearted. Here in the shop, you don't notice things so much. It's like being at the front. But there..."

"I wish you'd stop coming to the shop during raids," Krainev said.

"Thanks for the advice," she replied. "I don't come as your secretary--I come as secretary of the Consomol unit in our shop. Do you think it would be right for me to stay at home while the boys risk their lives here at the shop? A fine secretary I'd be then--and a candidate member of the Party, at that."

"I didn't know you were a candidate member. When were you admitted?"

"Last month."

"Sergei Petrovich," asked Matviyenko suddenly, "how is it you're not in the Party?"

Krainev's face clouded, and Teplova understood that the question had touched upon a sore spot. For some time he sat snoking silently. Matviyenko, waiting patiently for his answer, thought to himself:

"I wonder, really, why?"

Unassuming, straightforward, resolute, Krainev had quickly won the confidence and liking of the entire shop. The workers, Matviyenko recalled, had made no attempt to hide their relief when Krainev was appointed in place of Valsky. With the arrival of the new manager, quarrels and cursing had disappeared from the shop, and discipline had sharply improved. Inviting the chairman of the shop trade union committee and the secretary of the Comsomol organization to his office, on his third day in the shop, he had expressed his surprise at the small scope of socialist emulation among the steelmen. Plans for joint work had quickly been agreed to. And when it transpired that Krainev was not a member of the Party, people had found it very hard to believe.

"Perhaps he's been expelled, for some past error," Matviyenko had thought at the time.

"You see, Mikhail Trofimovich," said Krainev, after a long silence, "to be a member of the Party, it's not enough to have Bolshevik

convictions. You have to have a Bolshevik character."

"And what do you mean by a Bolshevik character?" Matviyenko asked.

"A Bolshevik character—that means the firmness and the purity of a diamond. As I see it, the Communists, among the masses, are like the particles of carbon in iron—the particles that make the iron into steel."

"Well, and what is it you lack, Sergei Petrovich?" asked Matviyenko bluntly. "Purity, or firmness?"

The question was squarely put. It remained only to refuse an answer, or to answer with equal bluntness. Krainev replied:

"Firmness, Mikhail Trofimovich. Firmness and self-control."

"You—lacking in self-control?" Matviyenko demanded, recalling Krainev's confidence at work, his composure during bombings.

"Yes," Krainev replied, with a sigh. "Don't you remember how I burst out against Shatilov, and how I acted in the director's office afterwards? I hold in as long as I can, but in the end I always blow up. 'High explosive,' the fellows used to call me at school. And nothing has been able to tame that explosive—not the army, nor engineering school, nor the Comsomol. I want

to be in the Party, and I try to grow up to it. But my idea of what a Party member should be grows faster than I do. And I don't feel worthy."

Krainev relit his cigarette.

"You ask other people's advice about many things," said Matviyenko. "Have you ever asked anyone about this?"

"Why, no, I never have," Krainev admitted.

"You ought to. Others can judge better than yourself."

"He's right," Krainev reflected. "How strange that it's never occurred to me! I go to people with all sorts of problems, and yet—never a word to anyone on such a vital question!"

CHAPTER FIVE

The front was nearing the Donbas. The works folk spent most of their time in the shops, and the shift signals lost all significance. When they sounded, workers, foremen, engineers would throng to the loudspeakers, listening with bated breath to the front-line communiqués, and then, instead of going home, return to their jobs. Melters would not leave until their furnaces had been tapped; the workers of the teeming bay, until the last ingot had been poured. Their tasks done, they

would go home—but not for long. At home, hearts would sink, and hands itch for activity.

Only at the works were they at ease, though their labour grew daily more difficult. Their ranks melted steadily, some being called to the colours, others wounded during air raids. The distinction between front and rear was gradually disappearing, and none could tell, when leaving for the works, whether they would ever be coming home again.

The Comsomol brigades and crews were particularly hard hit. Many of their members went off to the front, and those who remained refused reinforcements.

Passing by No. 3, one day, Krainev saw Nikitenko throwing dolomite into the furnace, with only Sasha to help him. The rest of the crew were busy at the back wall, plugging up the tap hole; and the charging machine was under repair. Sergei Petrovich told the foreman to send Nikitenko help from the next furnace, where the crew, though also shorthanded, was made up of older and stronger men.

A bearded worker strode up to No. 3, threw off his jacket, swept up a scoopful of dolomite, and started for the charging door.

But Sasha blocked his way, demanding:

“Where’s your card?”

The worker stared blankly.

"What card? What are you talking about?"

"The one that gives you the right to work at this furnace."

"What do you mean—the right? The foreman sent me here to help you out."

"What's the foreman got to do with it? Go shave off your beard and sign up in the Comsomol, before you come around helping here!"

The worker pushed Sasha aside; but he did not succeed in dumping his dolomite into the furnace. Nikitenko, replacing Sasha in his path, enquired:

"How many men in your crew?"

"Four."

"Well, there's four of us, too, uncle. So you can just get back to your own furnace."

The worker hesitated, afraid to disobey the foreman. But Nikitenko seized his jacket and ran off with it to the neighbouring furnace.

Grumbling, the worker followed.

Krainev, watching from a distance, was about to interfere. At this point, however, the machine was brought up to No. 3. Now Sasha had only to manipulate the levers, and the dolomite went flying into the furnace.

At about this time, Matviyenko began to notice a marked change in two of the engineers

with whom he came into frequent contact: Pivovarov and Valsky.

Pivovarov, manager of the electric power system in the open-hearth shop, had always been gruff and surly with the workers. Now, his thunderous bass dwindled to low, ingratiating tones. Valsky, too, who had never had a pleasant word to say to anyone in the shop, had suddenly become garrulous and emotional, effusing friendliness and sympathy upon all who would listen.

Lyutov, demoted from foreman to melter, behaved irreproachably—until, one October morning, his name once more went echoing through the works.

Soon after the change of shifts, the melter who took over after Lyutov noticed that the steel was scorching madly at the heart of the bath. This was a sure sign of demolition of the furnace bottom.

The melter immediately ordered the ladle set in place under the spout, hoping to tap the furnace in time to prevent disaster. Before his order could be carried out, however, the steel burst through the furnace bottom and began to spread over the floor.

Nature knows two fearsome elements: fire, and water. But what can compare with molten steel.

combining within itself the might of both these elements?

The fiery flood consumed or swept away all that lay in its path. The supports of the charging level warped. Rails writhed and twisted, living serpents. Then the advancing metal reached a water-filled pit, and a tremendous explosion shook the building. Dust came sifting down from the roof and the crane track girders. The cranes stopped. Darkness filled the shop. The workers stood hushed and motionless by their furnaces, afraid to stir in the impenetrable murk. Shift manager Bondarev, who happened to be out of doors in the stockyard at the time, rushed from one shop entrance to the other, trying desperately to get in; but the open doors were barred by scorching blasts of hot air, saturated with steam and dust. Huge drops of perspiration rolled down Bondarev's cheeks, which had turned an ashy grey.

Krainev, hurrying to the shop from the administration building, dragged him to safety. People were running up from all sides. Krainev tried to drive them away, shouting:

"There may be more explosions!"

But nobody left.

Matviyenko arrived, then Gayevoi and Dubenko. Valsky, too, came strolling up, twisting

his little moustache with a self-satisfied air, as though to say:

"When I was manager, such accidents never happened."

Even before examining the furnace, Krainev realized that its repair would probably require five or six days. This, however, he could not bring himself to say aloud. Beckoning to the shift manager, he said:

"Send immediately for the night shift foreman, and for Lyutov. It was their job to inspect the furnace before charging."

Examination of the furnace confirmed Krainev's worst forebodings. A hundred and fifty tons of steel lay under the hearth, a monstrous pancake, imprisoning within itself all that had lain in its path. Much of the metal had got into the main smoke flue, almost entirely blocking the outlet into the stack.

The heat was still so great that Krainev was soon dripping with perspiration. When he tried to light a cigarette, he found that the matches in his pocket were too damp to strike.

Sergei Petrovich did not go to the general report in the director's office. He was waiting impatiently for Lyutov. Again and again the messenger returned with the news that Lyutov had not yet come home. The furnace helper

declared that, after the tapping of the preceding heat, they had found a hollow in the furnace bottom, not far from the tap hole. Yet, without calling back the foreman, who had left to prepare another furnace for tapping, Lyutov had ordered the crew to charge as usual.

The foreman, frightened and upset, admitted that he had left the examination of the furnace bottom to the melter.

"After all, Lyutov's really a foreman too," he explained, in self-defence. "He knows just as much as I do."

Lyutov's disappearance troubled Krainev deeply.

An added difficulty in the repair of the furnace was the lack of sufficient oxygen for cutting out and removing, piece by piece, the steel "sow" that blocked the smoke flue. The oxygen plant at the Gorlovka fertilizer works had been damaged in an air raid, and was putting out only half its normal capacity.

"Could it really have been deliberate?" Sergei Petrovich wondered aloud.

Matviyenko silently handed him an open envelope. It contained the reply of the district Soviet to an enquiry about Lyutov sent by the shop Party bureau. Lyutov's father, it transpired, had been a kulak. With two of his sons, early

in the collectivization period, the elder Lyutov had set fire to the collective farm grain. All three had been convicted, and the rest of the family, including Nikolai Lyutov, the present melter, had been exiled to the North.

"When did this come?" Krainev demanded.

"Today. In the morning mail," said Matviyenko glumly. "Now it's clear enough."

Jumping to his feet, he began to pace the room.

"There's what I can't forgive myself, Sergei Petrovich," he continued, bringing his fist down heavily on the window sill. "Why didn't I enquire about him earlier?"

Wearily, he sank back into his chair.

The door opened. Limping slightly, a tall old man came into the room. He glanced at Krainev and Matviyenko, and, seeing that they were absorbed in conversation, sat down quietly on a chair near the door to wait. His bushy eyebrows were grey; but the lively eyes beneath them sparkled youthfully. This was Dmitryuk, manager of the refractories storehouse—a veteran of the open-hearth shop, where he had started as a bricklayer and later became, first foreman, then head foreman in his trade.

Dmitryuk had grown too old to carry on with his former duties, and Valsky, who liked

to boast of "efficient" management, had simply discharged him. Valsky himself, however, had been removed before the documents for the old man's discharge were signed. When Dmitryuk came in for the new manager's signature, and Krainev asked why he was leaving, the old bricklayer's sad look had replied no less eloquently than his words that, though his pension would provide sufficiently for his wants, he had no desire to leave the works. Krainev had rescinded the discharge, appointing Dmitryuk instead to work more suited to his strength. Sergei Petrovich knew the value of such veterans as this, aged together with the shop they worked in; knew the value of their practical experience, accumulated in years of labour, and their memory for petty, but often vitally important details.

Dmitryuk had taken new lease of life. Of a morning, after lecturing his assistant at the storehouse against all possible sins, he would mount to the charging level and examine the furnaces with gimlet eye. Then, seeking out the bricklayers' foreman, he would lead him from furnace to furnace, pointing out defects in the brickwork and signs of thinning or bulging of the walls. If the head furnace foreman came in sight, he, too, would be swept along in these tours of inspection, and Dmitryuk would grumble

at him like one in authority. Actually, the old man had no right to issue orders; but he was highly respected in the shop, and people grew accustomed to obey him.

One day he clambered, grunting with effort, into a furnace that was being reconditioned. Settling down on the sill, he remained almost motionless for some time, watching the bricklayers.

It was not long before he noticed that one of them was leaving too much clearance between bricks. Coming up to the man, he asked caressingly:

"Look here, sonny—who was head foreman when you learned the job?"

"What do you mean, who?" returned the bricklayer, smiling complacently. "Dmitryuk, of course. Anani Mikhailovich."

"Then he's a son-of-a-bitch, your Dmitryuk!" exclaimed the old man, in sudden fury. "Is this how he taught you to work?"

And he began to pull apart the newly-laid bricks.

The angry worker tried to interfere, but Dmitryuk brushed him roughly aside, grumbling, as he pulled the bricks out of place:

"You young son-of-a-bitch! So Dmitryuk taught you, did he? So you're my appren-

tice, eh? And not ashamed to say so to my face!"

The old man grew scarlet with effort, and beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead.

"Teach a fool!" he grumbled on. "Might as well stuff a dead man with pills!"

"What's it to do with you, you nosey devil?" shouted the bricklayer, seriously angry now. "Your job is the storehouse, and you can just stay out there, where you belong. I'll complain to the foreman. I tell you."

Dmitryuk straightened up.

"Where I belong? I'll show you where I belong," he said, and, seizing the bricklayer's arm, dragged him through the shop towards the record room, where a brief conference on the furnace repairs was in session. "Come along, come along. You can complain about me all you please, in there."

When angry, the old man had a hawkish look, strongly accentuated by his big nose and belligerently lowered head.

The head foreman left the conference to examine the furnace with them. He made no bones about his condemnation of the debated work, and the bricklayer began shamefacedly taking it apart. Now Grandfather Dmitryuk, satisfied that here all would be well, stalked around the fur-

nace, testing the work of the other bricklayers with a clearance gauge.

When there were no repairs in process, Dmitryuk would turn his attention to the melters. Armed with a blue glass in a battered wooden frame, he would peer earnestly into each furnace in turn.

On one occasion, looking into a furnace, he noticed that the roof was in a lamentable state. Long, slender "icicles," as they are called in the shops, hung swaying from the fire brick, testifying to inept application of super-high temperatures.

Dmitryuk stepped silently away from the peephole and turned to face the melter, whose uneasily shifting eyes betrayed his anxiety. Had the old man noticed, or had he not?

"Well, how goes it, Vasya?" Dmitryuk enquired.

"Oh, well enough. Were you out by the dam last Sunday, Anani Mikhailovich? How was the catch?"

Fishing was the old man's hobby and his favourite conversational topic. For a moment it seemed to the melter that his effort to turn the talk in this direction had succeeded.

"Yes, I was," Dmitryuk replied, half-closing his eyes, as though in pleasant reminiscence. It's

beautiful country out there, Vasya. Rushes all along the banks—so tall and slender, the least little breeze sets them swaying. Back and forth, back and forth. It's a pretty sight."

The old man paused; but just as the melter began to think the storm averted, he added, in an entirely different tone:

"Yes, back and forth, just like those icicles you've hung all over the furnace roof."

And, beckoning to a girl who was sweeping up the charging level, he sent her to call the shift manager.

The melter flushed.

"Why should it worry you, Anani Mikhailovich?" he began amicably. "If I were you, I'd just stay where I belonged, out in the storehouse, and take care of my bricks."

"What?" cried Dmitryuk. "Why should it worry me? Why, do you know who I am? Do you know that? Guardian of the refractories, that's who I am! Out in the storehouse, I keep tab on every brick. If a single one gets battered in unloading, the foreman's afraid to come near me for a week. And here you've set the whole roof afire, and you tell me not to worry! Seven thousand bricks gone to the dogs! Where will I get the brick to keep up with you, if you all start burning it up that way?"

The shift manager had not yet come. Losing patience, Dmitryuk himself limped off in search of him.

Krainev had grown very fond of the energetic old man, coming to look upon him as a sort of unofficial shop inspector.

Now, sitting quietly by the door, Dmitryuk waited in vain for the shop manager to enquire what had brought him to the office. At length he himself asked:

"What makes you so glum, comrades commanders?"

"There's nothing to be happy about," said Krainev heavily. "That furnace will be out of commission for a good ten days."

"And what will you say, Sergei Petrovich," asked the old man, with a mysterious smile, "if I start the furnace working tomorrow?" •

"That's a little -well, fantastic, grandad," Krainev returned, in obvious disbelief.

Dmitryuk came up closer to the desk.

"I can do it, Sergei Petrovich," he said. "I know the way out. You see, there's another smoke flue, an old one, right beside the one that's blocked. The furnace was rebuilt, a few years ago, and they moved it a little, and fixed up a new smoke flue. But they didn't fill in the old one. We can connect up with it, and send

the smoke through both flues. Together, they ought to work as well as one good one."

Sergei Petrovich sprang to his feet.

"Anani Mikhailovich! You're not joking, are you?"

"This is no time for jokes," the old man replied. "All the strings are taut, these days, and every one of them pulls straight at your heart. I'm in dead earnest, Sergei Petrovich. Give me some men, as many as you can, and we'll start connecting up with the old flue. By the time the hearth is ready for repairs, we'll have everything ready."

That night Krainev, asleep at the record room desk, was awakened by the electrician on duty, who called from the doorway:

"Sergei Petrovich! Come up on the roof with me."

"What for?" asked Krainev sleepily.

"To take a look at the front."

"Do you mean to say it's in sight?"

"Yes."

Krainev got up at once.

They scrambled hurriedly up the steep, narrow stairs to one of the crane track girders, and thence to the roof. The sky hung black, without a single star; but the horizon was bright with

incessant bursts of distant flame—evidently, our long-range artillery at work against the advancing German troops.

Krainev caught his breath. His heart stood still for an instant, then began beating rapidly, irregularly.

All next day he worked as in a dream. After what he had seen that night, it seemed very strange that people could go on living and working just as usual. Yet he, too, lived and worked the same as they. Several times, in the course of the morning, he visited No. 2 furnace, where a group of workers, with Dmitryuk in charge, was laying open the disused smoke flue. The old man was brisk and cheerful, showing no sign of fatigue, though he had been working without rest since the preceding afternoon.

After the report, Krainev was summoned to the office of Boyenko, chief of the town State Security headquarters.

Entering Boyenko's office, he found Gayevoi there before him, comfortably ensconced in one of the leather armchairs facing the desk.

"Well, what are we going to do about the shop, comrade manager?" Boyenko asked.

"We'll have to get oxygen somewhere, and cut out the sow," replied Krainev, assuming the question to refer to the trouble at No. 2 furnace.

Boyenko smiled bitterly.

"What are we going to do about blowing up the shop, comrade manager? That's what I called you in to discuss," he explained, with forced composure.

Again Krainev's heart stood still, as on the roof at night.

"With how long a time in view? Six months? A year?" he asked, when he could speak. Queer, he reflected, how calmly he pronounced these fearful words.

"How long do you think?" Boyenko countered, looking attentively into his face.

"Not very long—of that I'm sure. How long. I can't say."

Boyenko seemed pleased, both with the confidence of Krainev's beginning and with the frankness of his conclusion.

"We're not going to blow things up beyond restoration," he said firmly. "But we'll have to make a pretty thorough job."

"What do you mean, Boyenko?" cried Gavevoi, jerking sharply forward. "We'll be back again in six months at the most!"

"And if we aren't? If we have to retire too far?" returned Boyenko, frowning. "Do you realize what might happen then, if we spared the works? And if the Germans managed to set it

going? We'd have thousands of tons of steel from our own works raining down on us! No, no. Better make it a thorough job, even if that means more time, afterwards, for rehabilitation."

"What would you do to make it a really thorough job?" Gayevoi asked Krainev.

"It could be done this way," Krainev began, framing the words with sudden difficulty. "By blowing up the smokestacks. Seventy-metre brick stacks. Coming down on the shop, they would wreck the building, smash the crane track girders, the cranes, the furnaces. The shop would no longer exist."

Gayevoi shuddered, vividly imagining this appalling scene of destruction. Boyenko got up. His eyes fixed steadily on Krainev's, he said authoritatively:

"Not that way. Under no circumstances. And not a word to anyone of such a possibility. There are people at the works who think the war is lost. They might be mad enough to put such a plan through, if they heard of it."

Krainev suggested other methods. When the discussion was over, he asked:

"What about Lyutov?"

"Lyutov will be found." Boyenko replied.

Returning to the shop, Krainev found work in full swing. Bondarev was hurrying up and

down the charging level, evidently well pleased. All the furnaces were up to schedule, and he was doing his best to keep them so.

At No. 2, Opanasenko was pacing heavily up and down, pausing every minute or two to peer into the furnace. He was preparing the hearth for repair, and the temperature required constant regulation, like a rank-and-file melter. Opanasenko still used blue spectacles, fastened to the peak of his cap, instead of the framed glass usually carried by foremen and engineers. Even with these spectacles, however, he was always recognized at once, by his dignified bearing and commanding air, as a person in authority.

Dmitryuk climbed out from under the platform, black with soot and perspiration, tired and hollow-checked, but radiant. The old smoke flue, he reported jubilantly, was in excellent condition.

Krainev's dejection lifted for a moment. Soon, however, he turned away from the furnace, his brain echoing over and over the one thought:

"What's the difference? The works will go up in the air one of these days, anyway."

As he was leaving for home, he noticed a slender girl coming down the charging level, evidently quite at ease. She was about fifteen,

blue-eyed and fair-haired, in a light coat that stood out sharply against the grim background of the shop.

"What are you doing here?" he asked her.

"This is my daughter, Svetlana, Sergei Petrovich," said Opanasenko, hurrying up to meet her. "She's brought me some lunch."

While he was taking the wrapped sandwiches and the bottle of milk from her little basket, the girl said mournfully:

"Cousin Vasya's been called up, father. He wants to say goodbye to you."

Opanasenko thought for a moment, then said with a sigh:

"I can't leave the shop now, little girl. I can't. It's just impossible, Svetlana."

The girl looked up at Krainev in mute reproach. How could this man keep her father in the shop at such a moment?

"Father," she said, "the Germans have taken Oryol. And granny's there. What will she do?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"I know. It won't be long. We'll see our granny yet. Now you go home."

And Opanasenko turned back to the furnace.

Krainev caught up with the girl at the shop entrance.

"How do you get into the works?" he asked.

"I've got a pass," she explained proudly. "The director signed it. Father hardly ever comes home, these days, and he's so fond of milk. I suppose mother will have to get a pass too, pretty soon, if she ever wants to see him."

Sighing, she looked up at Krainev, and again he read reproach in her blue eyes.

Sergei Petrovich had not been at home for some days, and Vadim greeted him with such noisy rapture that his depression quickly lifted. Passing by the living room, however, he frowned painfully again. Irina had company: engineer Smakovsky, an old friend of hers--an affected, conceited, coldly courteous man, whom Krainev had never liked.

When he had washed and changed, Sergei Petrovich joined his wife and Smakovsky in the living room. Sinking into an armchair, he suddenly realized, as he had not in the shop, how tired he was, and how badly in need of sleep.

When the usual polite enquiries were over, Irina said to her husband:

"You know, Sergei, Vladislav advises me to get out of town, while I still can. And I think he's right."

Krainev glanced from one to the other in open amazement. Smakovsky dropped his eyes, embarrassed.

"Pardon me, Sergei Petrovich," he said, "but I'm afraid you're kept so busy at the works, you've no time left for your own affairs—no time even to think about your family. I'd really like to help you. Irina Vladimirovna and I are old friends, and my mother would gladly take her in."

"You seem to be in rather a hurry, don't you?" said Krainev ironically. "If the need should arise, it seems to me, we'll all leave together."

"Perhaps," Smakovsky replied. "But Irina Vladimirovna and the boy will be much safer in the country. No bombs are dropped out there. And this is the time to go, while travelling is still possible."

"There's some truth in that," reflected Krainev. Smakovsky's words had brought suddenly home the tremendous additional strain his nerves were bearing as the result of constant anxiety for his family.

Irina cast a furtive glance at Smakovsky, signalling that her husband seemed convinced. But Krainev declared firmly:

"No. Irina will leave when everybody leaves, and she'll go where everybody goes"

"What has 'everybody' got to do with it?" Irina demanded, with unconcealed annoyance.

"Just this: the workers' families aren't leaving yet, and therefore I can't send mine. I have no right to sow panic. Can't you understand, Irina? People in command are in the public eye. What would the workers think?"

"What do you value most—the lives of your wife and son, or the opinion of your workers?"

Smakovsky got up and took his leave, as though to emphasize that the dispute had become too grave to allow the presence of an outsider.

When the door had closed behind him, Irina said:

"There's one thing about you I never could stand. Why do you always have to do the same as 'everybody'? Why do you want all people to be alike, all grey, like boards in a fence?"

Irina's words carried an alien, almost a hostile note. Sergei Petrovich glanced at her sharply.

"Why can't you take care of your own family?" she continued harshly. "Day in, day out, you're in that shop of yours. And when someone else tries to help us, you won't let them."

"You tell me this, then," Sergei Petrovich demanded, flushing angrily. "Which of our engineers or administrators has sent off his family? Can you name me any? Even one?"

"What has that got to do with me?"

Sighing, he asked:

"Can't you really understand what I'm trying to say?"

But, as he now reflected bitterly, he and Irina had never spoken the same language. She had never tried to understand him.

Vadim came running in, waving a bright-covered *Murzilka*,* and climbed onto his father's knees.

"Read me a story, daddy," he begged.

"What he needs is a spanking, not a story," Irina put in crossly.

It appeared that Vadim, with a group of playmates, made a game of frightening the neighbours. Gathering on the stairs, near one or another apartment door, they would begin to imitate the drone of German planes. Doors would fly open, and frightened housewives would go scurrying to the bomb shelter, to the delight of the little mischief-makers. Afterwards, the victims of such pranks would come to Irina to complain.

* *Murzilka*—a children's magazine.—*Trans.*

Krainev looked down at his son with simulated severity. The boy's lively eyes, light hazel like the father's, avoided his glance.

"I won't do it any more, daddy," he pleaded. "Honest, I won't. I'll give you my whistle, even, that I do it with. Only read me a story."

Sergei Petrovich could not refuse. Opening the magazine, he began to read the story of brave Red Army man Spivak. Vadim cuddled close to his father, listening blissfully.

Irina went upstairs to the Makarovs'. Her husband, she knew, would not allow their dispute to continue in the boy's presence.

Just as the story reached its climax, there was a knock at the door, and Makarov came in. He, too, had washed and changed, and seemed a little rested.

"Go on. go on." he said, noticing the open magazine. "I'll smoke a cigarette while you're finishing."

Krainev finished the story, and, handing Vadim the *Murzilka*, pushed him gently towards the nursery. As the boy opened the door, however, Krainev called, suddenly remembering:

"Vadim! Where's that whistle?"

There was a protracted clatter in the corner of the nursery. The toy was evidently well hid-

den, beneath a heap of other childish treasures. At length Vadim reappeared, holding out a bit of pipe, stopped at one end, and with several holes drilled along its length.

Krainev wiped the whistle with his handkerchief, and put it to his lips. Blow as he might, however, no sound ensued but a faint hissing.

Suddenly, all three heard a distant roar of motors, steadily approaching. Makarov glanced anxiously in the direction of the works.

"They're ours," said Krainev. "They're coming from the East."

"Of course they're ours!" cried Vadim. "The German planes whine, like this"—and, seizing his whistle, he imitated expertly the intermittent drone of German motors. "These planes are ours."

The roar of the motors grew louder, pressing in on the eardrums, making the air seem heavy, almost tangible.

"If I could be with them, heading for the front!" said Sergei Petrovich enviously. "I never thought I'd be sitting the war out at home."

"We're at the front right where we are," Makarov returned. "And we're not sitting anything out, either."

For a while, neither spoke. Vadim quietly slipped his whistle up his sleeve and disappeared into the nursery.

Vasili Nikolayevich asked:

"What's wrong with Irina? She came up looking black as a thundercloud, complaining to Elena that you won't let her leave."

"Recruiting allies?"

"That's what it looks like."

"Well, and successfully?"

"No, I don't think she'll find an ally there. Elena's tried to be friendly with her, but it doesn't seem to work out."

"It never works out, with Irina," said Krainev, sighing.

Makarov raised his eyebrows. After several years' separation, the friends had not yet had opportunity for intimate talk. At first Krainev had been entirely absorbed in taking over his shop, and then had come the war.

"No, it never works out, with her," Krainev repeated, as though to himself.

Makarov could not refrain from asking:

"Why?"

"She was brought up stupidly. She was always very pretty, and capable. Well, and her folks put it into her head that she was exceptional, out of the ordinary, that she was des-

trained for extraordinary things. All her life, she chased after easy triumphs. She took up many things—now painting, now music. But she dropped them all when she found out that even talent won't get you anywhere without hard work. And if you have no talent, nothing but vanity—well, there you are. She wants to live in Moscow. Says it's too dull here."

"Have you tried to get transferred to Moscow?"

"What for? There's nothing for me there. I don't want to spend my days in an office—not this early in life. You see, Vasya, an engineer working in a shop is constantly learning; but an engineer working in the Commissariat has to be constantly teaching, instructing. And before he can do that, he has to feel, and those he instructs have to feel, that he really knows more than they do, and can get things done better than they. Until I reach that stage, there's no sense thinking about such work. And besides, I belong in the shop, at the furnaces, by nature. I've been shifted to other work once or twice, but I could never stand it. I missed the steel, and the men who make the steel. I enjoy working with them. In our industry, an engineer has more to do with men than with furnaces or machinery."

"So far as I remember," said Vasili Nikolaevich, smiling, "they taught us technology at the institute, not psychology. I should say you're wrong there."

"I'm very far from wrong," returned Sergei Petrovich, with great conviction. "Take my shop. It lagged below plan for almost a year—and in two months I brought it up to the mark. How? I couldn't do anything much to improve the furnaces, those first two months. It was the men I worked with. And that's the first requisite for success."

The clock on the wall struck nine. Krainev turned out the light, pulled aside the dark blind, and stood for some minutes looking out towards the works.

"Nikitenko's using too much gas again!" he exclaimed indignantly, and strode hastily to the telephone. When the shop answered, he said sharply:

"Tell Nikitenko to use his brains! He's got a torch on his stack again!"

Then, pulling up a chair beside Makarov, Sergei Petrovich continued:

"Do you think Valsky didn't know his job, didn't know the ins and outs of the furnaces? That's not so. Valsky's a competent engineer. But he didn't want anything to do with the men; and

so the men didn't want anything to do with him. He never took anyone's advice; so nobody offered him any advice. And he fell down on the job. Often enough, a leader's strongest point lies in his ability to ask and take advice. Valsky comes around to the shop every day now, much more often than his work in the engineering department requires, and I can see: he simply can't understand what's happened. No visible change, and yet--more steel! What's changed are human relations."

The telephone rang. Krainev took up the receiver and, after a word or two, handed it to Makarov.

"Coming," Makarov said briefly. Getting up, he explained to Krainev:

"Dubenko wants me to stay at the works tonight."

CHAPTER SIX

The People's Commissar had recently appointed Senin, head of the works transportation department, as his local representative.

Coming into the director's office, late that evening, Senin communicated the order to stop production and dismantle the works.

Dubenko refused to believe him.

"You're off your head," he declared calmly. "The People's Commissar will telephone me himself, if it comes to shutting down."

The director still regarded Senin as a mere department head. It was very strange, to be receiving orders from one's own subordinate. And what orders!

"The People's Commissar tried to call you, but he couldn't get connected," Senin explained. "And finally he got hold of me—I was out in Stalino—and told me to start for the works at once to bring you his orders."

Dubenko said:

"I won't shut down."

Senin turned his eyes on the director in long and stern enquiry. Then, swinging sharply about to Makarov, who sat, with Nechayev, at the conference table, he said:

"Comrade chief engineer! If the director proves incapable of realizing the situation, I shall have to make you responsible for carrying out the orders of the People's Commissar."

Dubenko sprang to his feet, almost overturning his chair. He was deathly pale.

"Sit down, Comrade Dubenko," Senin commanded, his eyes boring straight into the director's.

Under the penetrating gaze of these wide-set, unwinking eyes, the director regained his

self-control. Half mechanically, he struck a match and lit a cigarette.

"You personally will answer for any delay," Senin went on, when he felt that Dubenko was capable of sober thought. He strode to the door, but before leaving turned to add:

"I'll be back in two hours."

When he returned, accompanied by Gayevoi, the works was still running. As always the blower was sighing peacefully. A red glow hung over the blast furnace shop.

"What are we going to do?" Dubenko asked as they came in.

Gayevoi answered grimly:

"You've been told what to do."

"I won't shut down the works," the director declared, with unabated obstinacy.

Gayevoi said nothing, but glanced at Makarov; and Makarov understood his silent command.

"Then I'll shut it down," he said.

A heavy silence filled the room.

Slowly, as though undecided, Senin moved towards the telephone; but he was anticipated by a protracted ring.

"Moscow on the line," said the operator hurriedly. And at once Senin heard the voice of the People's Commissar.

"Who?" the Commissar asked tersely.

"Senin."

"Have you shut down?"

"No."

"Why?"

"The director refuses to carry out orders, Comrade People's Commissar."

For the first time in all his knowledge of the People's Commissar, Senin heard him curse, briefly and wrathfully.

"Shut down the works immediately. Immediately!" he commanded.

"Will you speak to the director?" Senin asked.

"I have no time," the People's Commissar replied, and hung up.

Dubenko had been standing close by, waiting to take the receiver. He dropped his eyes, and his face turned pale.

"Is that clear?" asked Senin, without moving.

The director swung around to face Makarov.

"Go to the open-hearth shop," he ordered, "and take charge there. Personally. I'll take care of the rest."

Lifting the receiver, he instructed the switchboard operator to summon the shop managers to his office.

Makarov left. Senin sat down and lit a cigarette. Silently, the director paced up and down the room.

"I just couldn't grasp it," he said finally.

"Well, and do you grasp it now?" Senin asked, with a note of fellow feeling.

"No," Dubenko admitted. "No, not even now."

When Krainev returned to the shop that night, Shatilov was preparing No. 5 for tapping. The crew had assembled near the spout, glancing impatiently at the big clock on the wall. It was five minutes to three.

Bondarev came up to report that the workers connecting No. 2 with the old smoke flue were finishing their task.

"Is grandad still there?" Sergei Petrovich asked.

Grandfather Dmitryuk, it appeared, had not left the shop in all this time. Krainev ordered a car called at once, to take the old man home.

Bondarev was going on to report on the work of the remaining furnaces; but he was interrupted by a messenger girl, who came running across the shop, calling:

"Sergei Petrovich! You're wanted on the phone!"

Krainev hurried to the telephone in the record room. Makarov's voice sounded in his ear, tense with emotion:

"Not another furnace must be tapped! Are any preparing?"

"No. 5 is ready."

"Hold it up. I'm coming around."

Krainev dropped the receiver on the desk, beside the stand. He knew he must get up and run to the furnace, but he could not move or catch his breath. It was as though some strong hand had compressed his heart, and would not let it go.

Bondarev came hurriedly in.

"Hold up No. 5!" Krainev ordered; and Bondarev ran off without wasting time on enquiries. Then Shatilov burst into the room.

"Sergei Petrovich," he cried. "What's up? The steel is ready! We've tapped during raids, often enough."

Evidently, he thought the delay to be caused by an expected air attack.

"Go to the furnace and see that the tap hole is plugged up doubly sure. You've been up on the roof, haven't you? Can't you understand?"

Shatilov dropped into a chair, blinking helplessly.

"You mean—we're done?"

The foreman seemed rooted to his chair, until Krainev shouted at him:

"Go plug up that hole!"

In the doorway, Shatilov collided with the chief engineer. He gasped, and ran on, his horror redoubled by Makarov's ghastly pallor.

"We're shutting down the works," Makarov said, panting for breath after his hurried walk from the administration building. "The Germans are near. Let's go turn off the gas."

He and Krainev left the record room together. Dmitryuk met them just outside the door.

"I've finished," he reported. "The flue's connected. Thanks a lot for the car. I couldn't have walked it home tonight."

Krainev wanted to tell the old man that the flue was no longer needed. Looking into the tired, soot-smeared face, however, he could not shape the words, but only nodded and walked on.

Bewildered by this indifference, so unusual in Krainev, Dmitryuk stood staring after the two engineers. He saw them go up to Lutsenko and call him aside; saw Lutsenko listen, staring at the floor, then look up as though to ask some question, but instead shake his head and hurry to the valves. The bright patches thrown by the flame onto the charging level suddenly

began to pale. Then the plumber dragged up a hose and directed a stream of water in at the charging door—into the very working chamber, always guarded so carefully against moisture.

Only now did Dmitryuk realize what was taking place. Dizzily, he leaned against the wall for support.

Within half an hour all the furnaces were dead, and some had been filled to overflowing with molten iron. Water was being poured uninterruptedly through all the charging doors. A hush fell over the shop. On the charging level, always so clean and dry, water squelched underfoot. The wind rattled the loose iron on the roof. The steelmen scattered aimlessly. There was nothing for them to do.

Everything in the hushed building, around the slowly cooling furnaces, bore the mark of vigorous activity, suddenly cut short: the huge ladles, seeming to await the surging steel beneath the furnace spouts; the motionless cranes, their powerful hooks suspended in mid-air; a spoon beside No. 5, prepared for the taking of the last assay; a long bar, leaning in readiness by the plugged tap hole.

Matviyenko visited the record room, the club-room, the locker room. Everywhere he found

gloomy, downcast faces. Never, since the January days of 1924,* had he encountered such deep and silent depression.

"Well, comrade secretary, so our working days are over?" someone asked him in the locker room.

"Yes, in the Donbas they're over, for the time being," he replied. "In two or three weeks we'll take our places at other furnaces."

"Where?" asked a voice from the far corner.

"In the East. Everyone who wants to help our Motherland will get to work out there."

"Ah," Lutsenko exclaimed contemptuously. "The Urals teakettles. A lot of good they are! I've seen 'em."

"Comrade Stalin has built up great industrial centres in the Urals, and beyond the Urals, too," returned Matviyenko reprovingly. And one of the workers, a well-built, handsome melter, demanded:

"What did you do through the five-year plans. Lutsenko? Sleep? What about the Kuznetsk Basin, and Magnitogorsk? They've got 'teakettles' out there that tap three hundred tons of steel every heat."

* January 21, 1924—the date of Lenin's death.—*Trans.*

"It's all right for you," retorted Lutsenko. "You travelled around all through the five-year plans, and left yourself a wife at every works. Now wherever you go, you'll be at home."

Nobody smiled at this sally.

"Well, friends," Dmitryuk said wearily, "I can't speak for you. But me—my travelling days are over. The old charger's fought his last fight."

Despite his fatigue, Dmitryuk had not gone home. His sorrow was too great to bear in solitude. For forty years he had worked over these furnaces—building, remodelling, repairing. And today he had seen them die.

Matviyenko came across the room and sat down beside the old man, saying:

"To my mind, Anani Mikhailovich, if anyone ought to leave, it's you. What will you do here, all alone?"

Dmitryuk's wife had died some months before, and his sons were in the Army.

"And what can I do out there?" the old man returned. "It was different here. I wasn't scrapped. Work was found for me. There was no job to fit, so a job was invented. But how will it be out there?"

"We'll find work for you there too," said Matviyenko gently. "Never you fear."

But Dmitryuk only shrugged hopelessly and turned his face away.

"Don't you shrug like that, Anani Mikhailovich," said Gavrilov, an elderly gas fitter, earnestly. "You listen to what he tells you. He's talking to you like he'd talk to his own father. Don't you stay behind. Me—I'd walk to the Urals, if there was nothing to ride on, to get away from the Germans. I had my taste of them back in nineteen-fifteen. A war prisoner, I was, and I got my fill for life of feeding on potato peelings. I don't want any more."

"There was a row at the railway station today," said old Pakhomich. "A big crowd collected around some peasant fellow, from Byelorussia. He kept telling over and over how he got away from the Germans. And didn't he curse them! He was hoarse with cursing. And in between curses, he says, 'Those robbers, they make us go halves on the harvest. One sack for yourself, and one for them.' Well, and backward folk, when they hear a thing like that—why, they begin to think the Germans aren't so bad as they're painted, after all, if they leave you half the harvest. And then Vasya Sizov, that works the scales at the station—he's a son of our Sizov here, the bricklayer—Vasya Sizov began to wonder. 'This peasant claimed he was going to his

brother's, in Krasnoarmeisk. Well, that's in walking distance. So why did he have to stay on at the station for five days and more, just gabbing? Vasya called the militia, and they took the fellow in. He owned up, too. The Germans let him get away across the front on purpose. They promised him a new house and cow, for that sort of talk, and I don't know what other trash. And off he went, to muddy people's minds."

"Yes," Gavrilov muttered glumly. "All the dregs and filth are coming to the surface now."

Matviyenko got up. Workers had gathered in the lunch room also, and he must join them for a while.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Towards daybreak, Dubenko summoned all the shop and department managers to his office. In the grey light of early dawn, the dead works seemed a fearsome place. No sound came from the shops. No smoke rose from the stacks.

Krainev recalled a poster, seen many years before. It had carried the slogan:

"The smoke of plants and factories is the breath of the Soviet Republic."

These smokeless stacks! How difficult they made the breath of the Motherland!

Dubenko paced up and down behind his desk, glancing impatiently, with eyes inflamed by many sleepless nights, at each latecomer. When all were assembled, he briefly explained the situation. In the last few hours the position at the front had somewhat improved. A Soviet tank unit, launching a counteroffensive, had checked the German advance on this sector, and time had thus been won for evacuation of the Donbas plants and factories.

In conclusion, Dubenko said:

"Be prepared to mine the shops at any moment; and in the meantime, load and send off everything possible."

Coming out into the yard from the administration building, Krainev was accosted by Lobachov, chief engineer at the power station. His manager having been badly wounded in an air raid, Lobachov was now in full charge at the station.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Lobachov.

"It's hard," Krainev answered. "Very hard."

"The Germans are encircling us, and what does the Government do? Instead of evacuating people, they're planning to evacuate equipment. What I say is, none of us will get away. Don't you feel the same?"

"No, I don't."

"The thing to do is leave, leave immediately," Lobachov whispered hurriedly. "You'll be sorry if you don't. They'll keep us here to the very last minute, and then leave us to face it."

Krainev did not reply. But he could not restrain a shudder at the very thought of failure to leave before the Germans came.

Lobachov hurried away, to accost the manager of the blast furnace shop.

"What do you make of it?" Krainev heard him ask.

The gates stood open for the incoming shift. The works was dead, yet the people came. They knew that there was nothing for them to do, and still they came. The workers of the morning shift, the workers of the evening shift, came pouring in at dawn to join the night shift, which had not gone home. Never had the works been so populous as on this bitter morning.

Noticing a light in his office, Krainev went in.

In one corner of the room sat Pivovarov, urging some point on Shatilov with unwonted animation. In another, loud snores rose from a row of chairs where the shop mechanic lay asleep, after working all night to keep the water flowing steadily into the furnaces. At the desk, Teplova was leafing the shop journal, need-

ess now. Again and again she read the final entry:

"October 10, 1941. 3:30 a.m. The shop has ceased work."

Krainev enquired after Matviyenko and, learning that he was nearby, in the shop lunch room, sent a messenger to call him. Then, glancing around the room, he asked all present:

"Why aren't you out in the shop, with the workers?"

"What for?" grumbled Pivovarov. "What can a person say to them? There's no fit words."

"Matviyenko finds words."

"Umph! There's a difference. I'm not Matviyenko."

"What difference?" Teplova demanded sharply. "Don't you always call yourself a nonparty Bolshevik? Don't you declare, at every meeting, that there's no difference between you and any Party member?"

Teplova disliked Pivovarov. She was revolted by his rudeness in the shop; by his shrill and empty wordiness at meetings, where he invariably took the floor on every question; by his constant immodest reminders of his participation in the Civil War—and, besides all this, by a vague, intangible something else, a something which she herself could not define.

Her question seemed to strike home. Pivovarov began to hem and haw, searching for some saving answer. At this point, however, the door swung open and Matviyenko came briskly in. The Party secretary seemed even more composed than usual. He had feared the consequences of this grievous night; and his fears had proved vain.

There were so many different people in the shop, each with his own twists of character, not all of which came to the surface in the ordinary daily work. A collective body may be compared with a steel ingot. The surface of the steel is smooth and lustrous, even in cross section. Only etching can bring out the dark stains which may be scattered here and there against the background of close-welded crystals. These are slag inclusions in the metal. And it sometimes happens that steel passing the tests for hardness and for tensile strength fails to come through this check for homogeneity of structure.

The workers of the open-hearth shop had withstood the tests of risk and danger, working on despite bombs and strafing; yet Matviyenko had feared the moment when this work should halt—when the rhythmic swing of intensive labour, organized by man and in its turn organizing man, should cease. How would the work-

ers react? Would not many of them scatter and disappear, as the bees scatter from a plundered hive?

This night had put an end to his fears. The organizing power of the collective remained unimpaired; and, as always, Matviyenko was able to direct it.

He glossed over nothing. He promised only that trains would be provided for all who wished to leave, and that work would be provided for all who evacuated. And none doubted his word.

When Matviyenko had settled down at the desk, Krainev informed him of the instructions just received in the director's office.

"For our shop," he continued, "I've been appointed chief of staff for the evacuation. Our aim: to send off everything humanly possible. The shifts and crews remain as before, except that they'll be headed by fitters and electricians. Have you any questions?"

"Just one remark, Sergei Petrovich," said Matviyenko. "I'd like to make a few changes in the make-up of the crews—to distribute the Party members more evenly." And, turning to Teplova, he asked, "What plans have you for the members of the Comsomol?"

"I think the Comsomol furnace crew should remain intact," she answered readily, "but the

rest of the Comsomol members ought to be distributed among the other crews."

"Very well," said Sergei Petrovich. "And now--to work!"

He went out into the shop. The others followed.

Bondarev was greatly relieved by their appearance. A throng of workers had gathered around him, near the record room, and he was having some difficulty in answering their questions.

Krainev explained the situation, with a brisk confidence which quickly calmed fears and rallied spirits. Now there was logic in the workers' presence here. They had a task to accomplish, a task the importance and urgency of which were realized by all.

Tools were distributed, and the work began, the grim work of destruction of values which had been built up and tended with solicitous care in the course of decades.

Melters, teemers, foremen, bricklayers were transformed into fitters, riggers, loaders. They bared the cranes of motors, trolleys, tackle, and controls; they dragged the machine tools from the repair department and the hammers from the smithy; interminably, they loaded, loaded, loaded.

The shop superintendent of building and property maintenance set his men to work on

loading and despatching. Always a champion of order and economy, he saw to it that every gap and chink, every interval of free car space among the heavy equipment, was filled in with whatever came to hand: oxygen cylinders, barrows, picks. Even the wooden shovels used to clear the yard of snow after winter storms were neatly embedded among the cases containing the different control apparatus. Clearly, the superintendent was determined to leave nothing movable behind.

"Where do you think you're taking all that stuff?" someone asked. "You'll lose half of it anyway, on the road."

"But the Germans won't find it," he returned. "What harm if we do lose it, so long as it remains in Soviet hands?"

Making the rounds of the shop, Matviyenko came upon the head fitter of the evening shift, under whose supervision Nikitenko's crew were removing the cab of the charging machine.

"What are you doing in this shift?" the Party secretary demanded. "You're mixing up the schedules!"

Instead of the fitter, Nikitenko answered:

"We're working straight through, till we finish the job. Time is short, Mikhail Trofimovich!"

And he turned away to hide the sorrow in his eyes.

The number of workers in the shop, many of them from other shifts, soon made it clear to the Party secretary that Nikitenko's crew was not alone in disregarding ordinary schedules.

Almost all the crews were working on the same principle: not the regular shift hours, but from beginning to end of a definite job. The men remained in the shop for days on end. An assignment fulfilled, they would sleep an hour or two, and then demand new tasks.

Thus does a well-organized collective correct its leaders. Nobody rescinded the order to work by shifts. Nobody called upon the men to stay on a job until it was finished. Yet by the end of the first day, this system was firmly established throughout the shop; and throughout the following days it was strictly adhered to. Assigned to dismantle one or another object, a crew would not leave while any removable part of that object remained.

This not only hastened the work, but at the same time simplified payment. Each job would be estimated on the spot, and the money due would be paid out at once.

Towards nightfall, Sergei Petrovich, altogether exhausted, thought of leaving for a short

rest. But Lutsenko's crew came in to be paid off for a completed job. Then Nikitenko arrived, for a new assignment. Grandfather Dmitryuk stumped in, insistently demanding work, and it took Krainev some time to persuade him to go home. One of the furnace helpers took the old man as far as the central gate, to see to it that he really left. Dmitryuk went out obediently enough, but immediately came in again at the side gate. And so it was all night—some coming, others going.

At six o'clock in the morning Krainev slipped away to the denuded express laboratory, now used as evacuation headquarters. Lying down on a couch, he fell immediately into a dead sleep.

A few minutes later Valya Teplova came in, staggering with weariness. Noticing Krainev, asleep on the couch, she hesitated, undecided whether to remain or leave. The draft from the open door made Krainev shiver in his sleep, but did not wake him. Valya closed the door. Taking a coat from a hook in the corner, she threw it gently over the sleeper. Then, too tired for further effort, she sank down into a chair.

Her thoughts turned back to her first acquaintance with Sergei Petrovich. Coming up onto

the charging level one afternoon, she had noticed a group of melters, evidently waiting for the whistle, and among them Opanasenko, smiling and animated—a thing so rare in him that Toplova's eyes had widened at the sight. Coming up closer, she had seen that the group was gathered around a stranger, a man in well-fitting dark-blue overalls, with his cap pushed somewhat back from his forehead. Questioned by the melters about conditions at the plant he came from, he had answered them all with cheerful readiness. His frank, pleasant, manly features had seemed familiar to Valya, and for a moment she had thought he must have worked in the shop before. On joining the group, however, she had found that she was mistaken. Before she could learn anything more, Valsky had come up, demanding:

“What are you doing here, young fellow?”

“I've come over from X,” the stranger had replied, naming a well-known Donbas works. He had spoken in the same friendly tone as before, seeming not to notice Valsky's offensive arrogance.

“What for?”

“To take a look around. I've been offered work in your shop.”

“What was your last job?”

“Assistant shop manager.”

Glancing at the head foreman, Valsky had said:

"How about it, Opanasenko? I believe we have an opening for a foreman."

And, turning on his heel, he had walked away.

Opanasenko had frowned; but the stranger had shown no sign of anger or embarrassment. Chuckling, he had asked:

"Is he always like that?"

"Most of the time," Opanasenko had replied, with a sigh.

"Oh, well, that makes things clear enough," the stranger had said thoughtfully. And the talk had gone on as before.

In the course of the day, Valya had met him several times—at the furnaces, in the stock-yard, in the teeming bay, where he had watched attentively the placing of the moulds. Then he had disappeared. But a week later Valya had been called into the office to be introduced to the new shop manager; and in him she had recognized the recent visitor.

The change in leadership had quickly made itself felt. Krainev as an administrator was demanding, yet always tactful and considerate; stern and unbending at need, but gay and cheerful whenever circumstances allowed. With his arrival,

Valya had begun to feel that her work was appreciated; and this had encouraged her to redoubled effort.

Valsky had always grumbled and scolded. Krainev knew how to rebuke, or praise, with a single quiet word, sometimes only a gesture.

Valya Teplova had virtually grown up at the works. She had come to the open-hearth shop as a messenger girl after her father's death, six years before, when she was only fifteen. Her father, head foreman Ivan Teplov, an open-hearth man from early youth, had been fanatically attached to his profession. Stern and reticent at work, he had been extremely talkative at home, and Valya had loved to listen to his stories of the shop, its people, its events. From her first day at the shop, all the workers had seemed old friends, so often had she heard her father speak of them. The steelmen, in turn, had quickly learned to like the bright-eyed messenger girl, for her quick intelligence and frank, winning manner. Knowing that she had lost her father, they had shown her much kindly attention. And so she had grown up, in an atmosphere of sympathy and friendship.

It had not been long before she was promoted, becoming first timekeeper, then book-keeper's assistant. After graduating from the met-

allurgical evening school at the works, she had been eager to work at the furnaces. Valsky, however, inalterably opposed to such innovations, had appointed her to the post of shop statistician and secretary. She had protested and rebelled; but in the end, unable to overcome Valsky's obstinacy, she had been compelled to yield. As time went on, Valya had come to like and enjoy her new duties. Still, she had never given up her dream of working at the furnaces.

Always, watching the furnace helpers pour out the assays of liquid, effervescent steel, she thrilled with envy. She carried in her veins her father's love for the submissive flow of molten metal.

With Krainev's arrival, Valya's hopes had revived. But then had come the war, sweeping aside all personal hopes and plans. After Lyutov's exposure, Valya had realized that she could do more good in her present position than as a novice at the furnaces. Again, her duties as secretary and statistician, bringing her into contact with all the different aspects of the work in the shop, facilitated her work as Comsomol secretary.

At the beginning, until he became better acquainted with the workers in the shop, Krainev had often called upon Valya for the most var-

ied information. These talks, generally brief and to the point, had at times developed into long conversations, and Valya had been vividly reminded of her father. The same love for his profession, the same absorption in the interests of the shop, rang in Krainev's voice and words.

Soon Valya had noticed, however, that, unlike her father, Sergei Petrovich was talkative at work, and—to all appearances—reticent at home.

She knew nothing, of course, about Krainev's home life: but she had guessed a great deal when she first saw Irina.

She had come to the club, one day, with a group of engineers from the shop, to hear a report on the situation at the front. While waiting, the engineers had settled down to smoke in the roomy vestibule: and Valya, standing nearby, had looked about in the hope of catching the work-Comsomol secretary, whom she wanted to consult on some urgent question.

"Look what a fine lady Smakovsky's got hold of," she had heard Pivovarc, saying, just behind her.

Glancing over her shoulder, Valya had noticed among the crowd a couple who stood out in striking contrast to the people around them: that

fop, Smakovsky, from the engineering department, and at his side a tall, slender woman, very stylishly dressed. Valya had looked with interest into the woman's handsome, somewhat frigid face, noting the thin lips, the austere coiffure. Listening idly to Smakovsky's animated chatter, the woman had let her eyes wander indifferently around the room.

As they passed the group from the open-hearth shop, the woman's eyebrows had lifted, and she had smiled in response to Krainev's silent nod.

"Who is she?" Pivovarov had demanded, with his usual lack of ceremony. "You seem to know her, Sergei Petrovich."

"Why, yes, I think I do," Krainev had replied. "She's my wife."

Pivovarov had flushed uncomfortably.

After a brief silence, Krainev had begun to chuckle, his eyes glinting with genuine amusement at Pivovarov's blunder: and Valya, catching his glance, had had to laugh with him.

Krainev stirred in his sleep, and the coat slipped to the floor. Valya lifted it and laid it over him again.

The door opened, and Matviyenko came in sombre as Valya had seldom before seen him.

"Has he been sleeping long?" he asked, nodding at Krainev.

Valya shrugged her shoulders.

"The Germans have taken Mariupol," he said slowly, as though reluctant to pronounce the words.

"Mariupol?" Valya cried, so loudly that Krainev started awake.

"What's the matter?" he asked, sitting up sharply.

"We've lost Mariupol," Matviyenko repeated.

"No!"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Radio report?"

"No."

"Then how do you know?"

"Our supply men were there, after oxygen, and they only got out by the skin of their teeth."

Krainev took a cigarette from his case, but did not light it. For a long time he stood twisting it between his fingers, as though at a loss what to do with it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

After that day, Dubenko was rarely to be found in his office. The administration of the works had been taken over by the evacuation

staff, and the director, not to be satisfied by mere telephone reports, spent days and nights on end in the different shops.

Dubenko knew how to pick men. In the intricacies of industrial production, he had long since concluded, no outstanding results could be achieved by placid, obliging, complaisant characters. The men he had chosen to head his basic shops were not easy people to get along with. Krainev was obstinate, Senin exacting, Nechayev brusque and sharp-spoken. All three had been unable to get on at other works, Krainev having quarrelled with his chief engineer and Senin with his director, while Nechayev had travelled restlessly from works to works, remaining nowhere more than a year. Under Dubenko, Nechayev had now been working for over five years.

When the Central Board directed such engineers to Dubenko's works to be "tamed," he willingly took them in, forgiving all flaws of temperament, if only they evinced those fundamental qualities which the Bolshevik Party had taught him to value in men: high principle, ability, efficiency.

On one occasion, the works Party secretary—Gayevoi's predecessor—had reproached Dubenko because the shop managers argued with one an-

other during the general reports in the director's office and demanded from the director no less insistently than he demanded from them.

"Would you rather see them bow and curtsy to one another, and get on their knees to me?" Dubenko had returned ironically. "They argue because they want to get things done. Hot hearts—hot words. And as far as demanding from me is concerned, let me tell you one thing: if they can demand from the director, then they certainly know how to demand from their subordinates. And that means they're good leaders and managers."

Dubenko encouraged initiative. Men with initiative stayed on with him, and the Central Board rejoiced at the "taming" of the shrews.

In these grim days, Dubenko found new proof that he had done well in his choice of managers.

Trained all their lives in the arts of construction and plant operation, these men were now carrying out their new and appalling task, destruction, with the same swift precision that had marked their normal activities.

Passing from shop to shop, Dubenko jealously checked the progress of the work.

In the rolling mill shop, he beckoned to the assistant manager and pointed silently at the bridges of the travelling cranes, still unremoved.

"Why bother with them?" the assistant manager asked indifferently. "They're not likely to be the right size for any of the Urals works."

"We'll bother with them because they'll be the right size for our own works, when we come back," Dubenko answered hotly. "That's one thing. And because we don't want to leave the Germans any chance of making the shops produce—that's another. And because it's easier to alter a crane bridge than to make a new one—that's a third."

"Ekh, Pyotr Ivanovich," the assistant manager sighed, with a hopeless gesture. "when you've lost your head, you don't cry over the hair."

"You don't cry over the head, either, if it's stuffed with sawdust," retorted Dubenko. "Go find the manager immediately, and tell him I want those bridges down and loaded by morning. You'll answer for them, personally."

And he strode rapidly away. Next came the sheet and plate rolling mill shop. This the director found bare and deserted. Only the reheating furnaces, stripped of their metal fittings, remained in place.

"Good work," the director said aloud, as he went out into the yard.

A long train of cars rolled by, and Dubenko stood watching it, taking account of the loaded

equipment: conveyor belts from the sintering plant; the shells of the powerful pumps in the water supply department; teeming crane trolleys from the open-hearth shop—intricate as enormous clock-works; the roll stand of the armour plate mill; hoists from the blast furnace shop; machine tools from the machine shop.

All the main shops were represented, with the exception of the air blowing station. Turning sharply, the director strode towards this station, a lofty building at the heart of the works territory.

On the light tile floor, around the towering skeletons of what had once been machinery, lay all that which had given the machinery life, piled neatly in readiness for shipment: valves and pistons; cranks, resembling gigantic arms crooked at the elbow; the rotors of the new turboblenders.

Dubenko went outdoors again. The autumn breeze cooled his heated forehead. Hurrying to the nearest telephone, he rang up evacuation headquarters and demanded more cars for the works equipment.

His next stop was the electric power station. Here he found the huge rotor of the main generator suspended over a flatcar, in the grip of a powerful assembly crane. As it moved slowly

downward, the workers in charge of its shipment watched in tense anxiety. Would the rotor shaft settle properly into position on the stanchions prepared to receive it? The foreman signalled to the crane driver, and the rotor shifted in the indicated direction. Then, after careful consideration, the foreman motioned vigorously downward. The rotor slipped smoothly into place.

In another moment the car was swarming with workers. Wielding hammers and axes, they began to board over the precious freight against wind and rain. Rolls of tar paper had already been brought up. Soon the car resembled a steep-roofed house on wheels.

Dubenko breathed more freely as he watched. The work was splendidly organized, and no urging was needed.

The foreman came slowly up, mopping the perspiration from his forehead, his face still set and strained.

"What about that one?" the director asked, indicating a second generator, still in operation. It was considerably smaller than the first.

"Condemned, Pyotr Ivanovich," said the foreman mournfully, as though speaking of a human being. "It will have to work to the last. We need light in the shops, and power for the cranes. And then we'll blow it up. The main thing

is. to save this generator—the one Comrade Sergo gave us on credit.”

As People's Commissar of Heavy Industry, Sergo Orjonikidze had taken the closest interest in the construction of this generator, first of a new design produced by a big Leningrad plant. When it was completed, he had turned it over to the Donbas steelmen, declaring:

“Remember, comrades—this is an advance, on credit. To be paid in steel!”

Dubenku recalled those years of heroic labour—the third Stalin five-year plan. The steelmen had kept their word, had returned their debt in full measure.

Countless threads stretched from the works to all parts of the land, to all the great construction jobs: rails for the Moscow subway, for the Turkmenian steppes, for the Moscow-Donbas trunk line; girders for the gigantic shops of the Magnitogorsk, Uralmash, Novo-Tagil, and Amurstal plants; sheet steel for the Moscow and Gorky automobile plants, the Stalingrad tractor plant, the Selmash combines; armour plate for the tanks at the front.

Now, only one thread remained, a frail thread, threatening to snap at any moment: two shining rails, along which the works equipment must be evacuated to the East.

On his way back to the administration building, Dubenko turned in at the blast furnace shop.

Yes, other plants could ship off all their equipment, and start life anew in the East. But iron and steel works could ship only auxiliaries. Their fundamental equipment—the furnaces—must remain behind. To make them useless to the enemy, the blast furnaces were to be choked with metal, and the open-hearth furnaces blown up.

For a long time Dubenko stood staring up at the looming furnaces and hot blast stoves.

There was no way of saving them. They could not be moved!

CHAPTER NINE

As evening was falling, Valya Teplova, in grease-stained overalls, came angrily into the shop-evacuation headquarters. Eager to do her share together with the rest, she had clambered onto one of the cranes and set to work; but the men had gently appropriated her wrench and sent her away. The work was dangerous in itself, and doubly dangerous in that now and again German planes, breaking through the antiaircraft barrage, rained machine-gun fire on the works.

Matviyenko asked Valya how many evacuation certificates remained unclaimed, and requested her to have their owners called in to see him, one at a time. She spoke at once to the messenger on duty, who hurried out into the shop.

The first to appear was Dyatlov—a tall, hale old man. Twisting his moustache, he looked enquiringly at the Party secretary.

"Here's your evacuation certificate," Matviyenko said, holding out the document. "Aren't you planning to leave?"

"Where to? I was born here, and lived here all my life, and it's here I'll be buried in the end. Why should I leave? I can't be any use to anyone, any more, either here or where you're going."

"You'll be no good to anyone here—that's so," put in Krainev, who was sitting at the desk with Matviyenko. "But there's plenty of furnaces out in the Urals. And a skilled bricklayer like you will be valued highly."

In the end, Dyatlov took his certificate and thrust it into a pocket. It was hard to say, as he left the room, whether he had really decided to leave or whether he had simply taken the document to cut short a conversation which he found unpleasant.

Opanasenko came in, seeming to fill the whole room with his massive bulk.

"I'm not leaving," he declared determinedly. "I've my house to think about, and all the furnishings. The piano, too—just bought it not long ago, for my little girl. The years it took to get it all together, and now you say—drop it! Everything would be stolen, and I'd be back at scratch. And anyway, Svetlana's sickly. She'd never make it to the Urals. We'll come through, some way or other."

Persuasion was in vain. Opanasenko returned to the shop without his certificate.

A woman entered, in a shawl and padded jacket. Nobody had sent for her.

"I'm Pakhomova," she said. "My husband's in the army. I want to evacuate."

Matviyenko explained that her certificate had been sent to her home by messenger, and she hurried off.

The door was kicked violently open, and a short, swarthy young fellow strode into the room.

"Well, what d'you want?" he asked defiantly.

"Why don't you come around for your evacuation certificate?" Matviyenko enquired.

"What the hell do I want with it?" he returned, and started to leave.

Krainev sprang up, shouting indignantly at him:

"Stop!"

"What now?"

The fellow spoke in the same defiant tone: but he stopped, just inside the door.

"Why don't you want to leave?" Matviyenko asked him quietly.

"What am I going to eat out there? Here, I can make my way with this"—and he pointed to the wrench protruding from the pocket of his greasy overalls. Grinning, he turned on his heel and marched out, leaving the door wide open.

"And how do you like that?" said Matviyenko. "He aims straight for the jaw! True to breed, all right. He's a nephew of Lyutov's. Only Lyutov started differently—tried to pass himself off as a harmless lamb."

Sergei Petrovich did not answer. Looking back over these last days and nights in the shop, he realized regretfully that, engrossed in the dismantling operations, he had spoken very little with the workers about the impending evacuation.

The telephone rang. Valy answered, and immediately handed Matviyenko the receiver.

"I see. I'm coming right away," he said. Lighting a cigarette, he hurried out.

Silence filled the room

After some time, Teplova said:

"You know, Sergei Petrovich I'm staying behind."

"Staying?" he asked.

She did not reply. Her head was bowed. Krainev sat staring at her, surprised and bewildered. Then he saw that her shoulders were shaking. At a loss for words, he poured a glass of water and brought it to her.

When she could speak, she said:

"I can't leave. You must understand me, I can't. My mother's ill. She's been bedridden for over a year. She has nobody but me. How can I leave her here alone, a helpless old woman? I've thought and thought about it. If it were you--you wouldn't leave your mother that way either. Would you?"

"I wouldn't stay," he said, as firmly as he could.

"Yes, I suppose you wouldn't. But--if your little boy were left behind?"

Krainev started. He had never asked himself such a question.

"I wouldn't stay," he repeated, dropping his eyes.

"That's not true," she returned. "I can see it's not true."

"Valya, come with us. You know how the Germans treat our people. And you're a Communist."

Moving away, he looked at her across the room, for the first time really seeing her big grey eyes, her pleasant, open face.

Valya sighed.

"Goodbye, Sergei Petrovich," she said, getting up, and held out her hand to him. He did not move.

She moved slowly towards the door.

"Valya!" he cried. "Come with us!"

Turning, she looked sombrely into his eyes.

The door opened, and Makarov strode in.

"Goodbye, Sergei Petrovich," Valya said, and quickly left the room.

Krainev moved after her; but Makarov blocked the way, saying, in his most official tone:

"Comrade manager. I'm here on urgent business."

"Can't you understand?" cried Krainev, so desperately that Makarov started and moved aside. "Can't you understand, Vasili Nikolayevich? We're losing her! She's staying behind!"

Pulling open the door, he dashed out of the room. Makarov followed.

Krainev hurried through the shop, and out to the works gates. But Valya had disappeared.

CHAPTER TEN

Late that evening, German planes appeared over the works, and immediately violent explosions set the earth trembling underfoot.

"Half-ton bombs, maybe even bigger," Krainev said to himself, turning his head in the direction of the power station, where the explosions seemed concentrated.

The planes swept low over the shops, strafing them from machine guns, despite the furious anti-aircraft fire. A man dropped from the bridge of one of the teeming cranes, and crashed onto a pile of ingots. Workers hurried up to him from all sides.

"Who is it?" Krainev asked.

Nobody answered. The dead man was battered beyond recognition.

Krainev looked up at the bridge. Why did no one come down? Were the men all dead? Then, outlined against a patch of moonlit sky shining in through the shattered roof, he saw a group of men at the handrail, lowering a moaning comrade on a rope. The workers ran to receive him.

Now the crew came down, by the side stairs. Opanasenko was at their head.

"Who was killed?" Krainev asked.

"Gavrilov," the head foreman answered glumly.

Sergei Petrovich recalled the night when the works had been shut down, and the sturdy figure of the gas fitter, moving from furnace to furnace, skilfully helping the melters at the valves.

Stretcher bearers removed Gavrilov and the wounded man, who was still moaning loudly.

"Well, let's be going," said Opanasenko. "There's work to be done. Lutsenko, you look in at the first-aid station and find out how bad it is."

The head foreman strode back to the stairs. He did not glance behind him. He knew that the workers would follow. Sergei Petrovich went up with them, thinking to cheer the workers as best he could, and at the same time to see how much remained to be done on the cranes.

From this height, he could view the entire town. The tree-lined streets and squares, flooded with moonlight, looked drowsy and peaceful. The town seemed sunk in slumber.

Tearing himself reluctantly away from this scene of illusory peace, Krainev went over to the second teeming crane. Several men were perched on the crane bridge, hard at work on the trolley. One of them called:

"Watch out, Sergei Petrovich! The higher you climb, the harder you fall!"

Planes were approaching from the West—Soviet fighters, returning to their fields after driving off the enemy bombers.

For a long time there was no light or power. Several workers at the power station had been wounded, and the switchboard was damaged. One bomb, landing in the coalyard, had fortunately failed to explode. Several others had burst harmlessly some distance away.

Bondarev appeared on the crane track girder.

"Sergei Petrovich," he cried excitedly. "I've been searching for you for the last hour! Dubenko telephoned to say you might go home and send your family off. The train leaves in fifty minutes."

Krainev scrambled down the stairs and hurried home, almost on the run.

He found Irina reading.

"Get some things together quickly," he told her breathlessly. "The train's leaving in less than an hour."

"In the first place, you might say hello," Irina returned composedly; and only now did Sergei Petrovich realize that he had not been at home for two days. "And in the second place," she added, after a short pause. "I'm not leaving on that train."

"What do you mean—you're not leaving?" Krainev demanded, afraid to believe his own ears.

"It's simple enough, what I mean. I'm staying here."

"With the Germans?"

"Why the Germans? With the Russians."

"I don't understand. You said yourself you wanted to leave."

"And now I don't want to any more. Trains are bombed every day."

"But everyone's going."

"Everyone, everyone! Always the same story," she said, grimacing.

Krainev flared up at this.

"Listen here, Irina," he exclaimed, "this is no time for jokes. You'll miss the train."

"I won't miss any train. I'm not trying to catch any," Irina said, still perfectly composed. "And you, Sergei—what makes you hurry so? You're not a Communist, and you're not a Jew."

He stared at her uncomprehendingly.

"Where will you be going?" she asked; and now her voice seemed unfamiliar, altogether alien.

"You know where. To the Urals."

"And what's waiting for you in the Urals? The Germans will come there too. Look, Sergei"—and, for some unclear reason, her voice

dropped almost to a whisper—"are you really sure Russia will conquer Germany?"

Krainev saw again in his mind's eye a scene witnessed at the works gates that afternoon: mud-spattered trucks and carts; tanks, bullet-dented, black with smoke; soldiers' faces, weary, but resolute.

"I'm sure and doubly sure," he answered passionately, "that Germany will never conquer Russia. Never! All of Europe's technical might is against us today—that's so. But there will always be Soviet land. Soviet rule can't cease. The day will come—I can't say how soon, but it will come—when we recover all we're losing now. And it's to help bring that day nearer that I'm going away. I'd go anywhere for that. I'd work in the midst of the taiga."

He paused, breathless with emotion. Irina took advantage of his silence to say:

"Very well. But I'm not going to the taiga. I'm staying here."

"Can't you understand," he went on, disregarding her interruption, "Even if life had been hard on me before the war, I'd go just the same. I'm a Russian. I can't play the lackey to Germans, or to anyone else, either. I have the self-respect that belongs to Soviet citizens. Surely you have it too?"

"I can understand how you feel," said Irina condescendingly. "Soviet rule has given you so much, made an engineer out of an illiterate miner's boy. But what has it given me?"

"How can you ask?" he cried indignantly. "It has given the same to both of us: the right to everything! Why didn't you use that right? I used it. I worked, and studied. And you? All your life, you've been chasing some phantom happiness. You still think life is a bonbon box, stuffed with goodies for the taking. In our society, nothing is given for nothing; but everything is to be gained by earnest work."

He glanced at his watch. Only twenty-five minutes remained.

"If you don't find the treasure under one tree, you try another," said Irina, smiling.

"And you've decided to try those cannibals?"

She frowned disgustedly.

"As though anyone really believes such things about the Germans!" she exclaimed. "The nation that gave the world Schiller, and Goethe, and Wagner! Ridiculous! Pure war propaganda."

Sergei Petrovich gasped. These hostile words had been pronounced with such conviction as to make further argument obviously superfluous.

Without another word, he went to the nursery and woke his son.

Accustomed to such sudden awakenings during night alerts, Vadim did not cry, but helped his father dress him.

Irina followed Krainev into the nursery.

"I won't give you the boy," she declared, with affected resolution, and stretched out her arms to the child.

"Try not to. I'm not leaving him to the Germans," Krainev replied harshly, his eyes flashing such anger that Irina backed involuntarily away.

She knew her husband well; and today, for the first time in their life together, she felt that he might strike her. Dropping weakly onto the bed, she buried her face in her hands.

Krainev wrapped his son in a blanket and started for the door. But a new thought struck him. Turning back to his study, he hastily rolled up the drawings that were piled in his desk drawer, and thrust them under his free arm.

When he came out into the street, it was raining. A cold wind swept down in noisy gusts, now driving him forward, now trying to bar his way. Vadim's blanket, wrapped around him with masculine clumsiness, kept slipping open, and the child began to whimper. After the brightly-lit rooms, the darkness seemed impenetrable, and Sergei Petrovich kept stumbling

into invisible puddles; but he hurried on towards the works without an instant's pause.

At last he passed in through the open gates. That night the gatekeepers demanded no passes. Hundreds of people thronged along the tracks beside the waiting train. There were many carts and wagons, loaded with household goods.

With some difficulty, Krainev searched out the train commander, who informed him that Makarov's family was in the second car.

When Sergei Petrovich climbed into the car, it was not yet crowded. By the light of a railway lantern hanging on the wall, he soon discovered Elena Makarova and her little boy, sitting on the wide plank bench built around the sides of the car. Victor was playing with a big plush bear.

"Elena Nikolayevna," Krainev said rapidly, "take Vadim along and be a mother to him. It's no easy thing I'm asking of you. I know. But I have no other way out."

Elena stared at him amazedly, and asked:

"Why, where's Irina?"

"She's staying here," he replied dully.

"Sergei Petrovich! What are you saying? Couldn't you persuade her?"

"Did you need much persuading, Elena Nikolayevna?"

She was silent for a moment. What persuasion could have been needed, for her or for any of the hundreds of women on this train? Then, seeing that Krainev still had the boy in his arms, she cried hastily:

"Of course I'll take him! Of course, of course! I'll bring him safely to our journey's end." And, very softly, she added, "If we get through."

Krainev bowed his head. He knew of the daily bombings of the big railway junction, not far ahead, through which the train would have to pass.

"Let's hope and believe that we'll meet in the Urals, Elena Nikolayevna," he said finally, putting Vadim down on the bench beside her. "And take these drawings, too, if you will. They're also my creation."

"We'll hope and believe. And I'll take your drawings too."

Suddenly Vadim began to cry.

"My bear! I want my bear! Bring it to me!"

The child was so fond of his plush toy that he would take it to bed with him, and wake up crying when his parents tried to take it away.

"I'll bring it, sonny! Right away!" cried Sergei Petrovich, almost cheerfully, and sprang out of the car.

As he raced up the stairs at home, warm with running despite the rain, he felt that now he must succeed in persuading Irina to go. But the apartment was empty. In the disordered bedroom, an old coat, thrown over the back of the easy chair, and an empty valise, wide open on the floor, spoke of hasty departure.

"So she did decide to go!" Krainev thought happily. He seized the plush bear from Vadim's rumpled crib, and hurried back to the works.

The engine was puffing heavily as he ran across the yard. There was a clanging of buffers, then an instant's hush, and the cars came slowly into motion.

Elena was at the door of her car, with Vadim, peering out into the darkness.

"Has Irina come?"

Elena shook her head.

How naive of him, to believe even for a moment that Irina might change her mind!

"Catch the bear!" he shouted, tossing it in at the open door.

The bear plumped down on the floor behind them, and Vadim rushed to pick it up.

Only after the last car disappeared did Sergei Petrovich realize that he had not said goodbye. He sat down heavily on the rain-wet rail and

lit a cigarette. How infinitely these last days had tired him!

"It cracked long since, and now it's broken," he reflected bitterly. "No more family. Irina.... Where is she now, and with whom?... Vadim's off for the Urals. Will he get there safely? And myself? Who can say where I'll land up?" He could not picture himself travelling East, with the sick and the aged. "I'll get into the army, come what may! Vadim? Vadim will be all right." He tried to be calm; but the thought of Vadim, alone, without father or mother, filled his heart with numbing pain.

Suddenly he saw himself as a stranger might see him: sitting all alone, in the rainy night, on this cold, wet rail. The sense of loneliness was so poignant that, conquering his fatigue, he sprang to his feet and hurried to the shop, to be among people—among his friends and comrades, closer now, after these days of danger and labour shared, than ever before.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Gayevoi, Matviyenko, and Andrei Serdyuk, a worker from the rolling mill shop, climbed out of their car in front of the headquarters of

the town Party committee. On the sidewalk, at the very entrance to the building, they noticed a truck, with dimmed headlights and open sides.

Entering the dark vestibule, they collided with a group of men who were lowering some big, heavy object down the stairs from the second floor.

Serdyuk recognized this object as the iron safe in which Party documents were kept.

Upstairs, the corridors and waiting rooms were thronged with people. Gayevoi frowned, thinking of the long wait ahead. To his surprise, however, secretary Kravchenko's waiting room was empty. As an old comrade, and secretary of the town's biggest Party organization, Gayevoi had always entered the office of the secretary of the Town Committee without ceremony. But today, when he looked in, Kravchenko, absorbed in conversation with an elderly woman whom Gayevoi had never seen before, glanced at him with evident displeasure and requested him to wait outside.

Gayevoi rejoined his companions, puzzled by this unusual reception. Fingering the stubble on his cheeks, he reflected shamefacedly that Kravchenko was smoothly shaved, and seemed efficient and composed as ever.

Quite some time passed before the elderly woman left.

Kravchenko asked Gayevoi and Matviyenko into his office and began to question them, in great detail, about the dismantling of the works and the mood of the workers. Only now did Gayevoi notice the razor cuts on Kravchenko's cheeks, and the dark circles under his eyes. When all his enquiries had been satisfied, the Party secretary asked Matviyenko:

"Well, Mikhail Trofimovich, and what are you planning to do with yourself now? Evacuate with the works, or join the army?"

Puffing at his cigarette, he waited quietly, with seeming indifference.

"I think my place is really in the army," Matviyenko replied, after a brief pause. "As a worker, I can be spared. There are plenty of plumbers in the rear. I'd be of more use at the front."

"What's your army rating?"

"Private."

There was another pause. Then Matviyenko repeated:

"Yes, my place is in the army."

"Is that what your heart dictates, or your understanding?"

"It's what my conscience dictates. My conscience will be more at peace."

"By this time the instructor was getting nervous.

"'What's wrong with him?' he whispered to me. 'He's supposed to be making a speech for the loan!'

"I was a little bit troubled myself, I must admit. The open-hearth shop has always led the works in loan subscriptions, and I'd been wanting to show it off. But Matviyenko went right on, asking question after question. Finally, he said a few words himself, summing it all up, and then he asked the meeting:

"'So you all know just as well as I do where the money goes that we lend our Government—right?'

"They all answered, 'Right!'

"'And you know what we've come together for today, too—right?'

"'Right again!'

"'Well, then, let's get down to it!'

"He took the subscription sheet, and signed up for two months' pay. And all the rest followed his example. So—don't you worry about him. He always finds the right words, simple and to the point. He'll make a good army political worker."

"Well, and what about Serdyuk?" Kravchenko asked. "I don't know him at all."

"Matviyenko doesn't spout; but Serdyuk doesn't talk at all. Shut up tight as a clamshell. Severe and, lately, gloomy. But I've known him since he was a boy. He's crystal clean."

"Crystal clean, yet he was ousted from the border guards," said Kravchenko, with a second quizzical glance at Gayevoi. "All right, then. Since you say he's so reserved, you'd best get out. There's a crowd, with that sort."

Gayevoi called Serdyuk into the office, and himself went out into the waiting room.

While Serdyuk was crossing the room, shaking hands, settling down in an armchair, the secretary of the Town Committee studied him attentively: the figure, bulky, but powerfully built; the brawny arms, well suited to wield the roller's tongs; the rough-hewn, massive features.

Serdyuk unhurriedly lit a cigarette. Turning his head suddenly, he caught Kravchenko's penetrating gaze.

"First time I've met you," the secretary explained, half apologetically. "You were away from the works quite some time. I believe."

"Five years."

"And how long is it since you got back?"

"Six months."

"Why were you removed from the work you were doing?"

Serdyuk's eyes clouded, and he turned away, muttering:

"That's an old story. No need to bring it up."

"The Party organization is planning to trust you, Comrade Serdyuk, with a dangerous job, and a very honourable one," said Kravchenko; and Serdyuk stiffened at once in eager attention. "The Party organization has to know whether you can be depended on to do it properly. The works Party committee vouches for you. But I must form my own judgment. Why were you removed?"

"I was questioning a prisoner," Serdyuk said, glumly, but with a new animation in his eyes.

"And shot him?"

"No. If I'd shot him, I'd be in prison now. I only punched him, just once. You can see for yourself, the sort of fists I've got." And Serdyuk laid an enormous hand on the desk.

Kravchenko could not restrain a smile.

"What would you rather do?" he asked. "Join the army, or stay in the rear?"

"What would I go to the rear for?" returned Serdyuk, in an injured tone. "The army, of course."

"Not go to the rear, but stay in the rear, behind the German lines," the secretary explained.

Serdyuk looked across the desk at him with lively interest.

"As a partisan?" he asked.

"As the leader of an underground group."

"That suits me," Serdyuk said eagerly. "The only trouble is, how will I fit in, underground?" He spread his arms, as though to show his mighty bulk.

"Yes," returned Kravchenko, smiling, "you're certainly hard to miss. And now, I'd like to know a little more about that trouble of yours. Just how did it happen?"

"It wasn't much," Serdyuk replied. "The rules are very strict, in the border guards. While you're hunting a border sneak, you can kill him if you have to, but once he's caught, you mustn't lay a finger on him. All the filthy rot I had to listen to, questioning them! And one day I let go. They caught this fellow, and brought him to me, straight from the woods. Long, and skinny, in yellow-green camouflage overalls, all wet and muddy. A tiny head, and eyes like pin points. It made me sick, just to think of him crawling across the border onto our soil—squirming and wriggling, hugging the ground, poking his head out of the grass on that long neck of his, just like a snake. Ever since I can remember, I could never stand anything that comes

crawling along the ground—snakes, and lizards. I always want to squash 'em. Well, and, comrade secretary, this skunk comes over to my desk, and twists himself into a chair, as if he were doing me a kindness. He pokes his dirty fingers into my cigarettes, and lights up, and then turns round to me and asks—mind you!—he asks me, 'Well, was there something you wanted to say?' "

Serdyuk's fists clenched at the memory.

"So I let fly," he continued. "He was in hospital for ten days, having his jaw repaired. They had to feed him through a tube. I've the doctor to thank that they brought him round. I was under arrest till he got better, and then I was released and given a ticket home. But I finished up the questioning, just the same."

"How?" Kravchenko asked in surprise.

"You see, he was being questioned by a friend of mine. And I talked my friend into letting me come in. It took me a good two hours to talk him round. I swore by all the gods I wouldn't touch the fellow. And when I came in, that skunk just took one look at me, and began to talk."

"Hmm," Kravchenko drawled thoughtfully; and Serdyuk glanced into his face in unconcealed anxiety. But, unexpectedly, the secretary concluded:

"Well, well, it doesn't matter. Mistakes will happen. Was that the only one? Or has there been something else?"

"No, nothing else."

"All right, then, Comrade Serdyuk. I think, just the same, that you're the right man for the job. You've been forgotten, more or less, in town. At the works, you've been a rank-and-filer in the Party, and rather inactive lately." In these words, there was a note of reproach. "Only remember: self-control! At the border, one snake was too much for your patience. Here, you may find yourself in a regular nest of them. Clench your teeth till they crumble—but keep yourself in hand. Will you manage?"

"I'll manage, comrade secretary."

"You're being assigned a special field of work. Picked for you or rather, you were picked for it. The Gestapo. Paralyze its work to the best of your abilities. Spike its guns. It's a dangerous enemy you'll be fighting, and the struggle won't be easy. But the harder the task, the greater honour in its accomplishment. These will be your helpers."

And Kravchenko held out a list of names.

Two of those listed, the Prasolov brothers—Pyotr and Pavel, popularly known as "the Apostles"—were old friends of Serdyuk's.

The Prasolovs were a mettlesome, high-spirited pair. Before joining the Comsomol, several years earlier, they had been led by their scething energy into a number of wild escapades. Serdyuk, at that time Party representative to the Comsomol unit in the machine shop, where the brothers worked, had done much to help them direct their energy into different channels. As time passed, they had become active members of the Comsomol, and high favourites among the youth at the works.

Not quite coolheaded enough, perhaps, for the task in store; but their courage and enterprise were not to be doubted.

Serdyuk protested, however, against the third name on the list, that of Maria Grevtsova, a bookkeeper's assistant in the payroll department. Maria was just an ordinary girl, one among many. He could hardly even recall her features. But Kravchenko firmly overruled his objections, declaring:

"Your judgment is superficial. Take a look into her heart, and you'll find it brimming over with hatred for the enemy. Her brother was killed in an air raid, at the works, and her father was killed digging trenches. She tried every way she could to get into the army, but they wouldn't take her, and so she decided to stay right here and

fight. Splendid human material! All she needs is guidance. She looks a quiet soul—you're right there; but that's only to the good. A girl like that can be used for any job. She'll get through anywhere without arousing suspicion. You'll be recruiting her kind, yet."

"Recruiting?" cried Serdyuk amazedly. "Among the people who stay behind?"

"Do you really think all those who stay behind are enemies?"

Serdyuk sat pondering over this question for a while. Finally, he asked:

"And are these three the whole of my group?"

"So far, yes. There's still the question of Teplova. We're urging her to leave. But if she decides to stay, we'll add her to your list. You'll be informed. If you should need help or advice, go to this comrade."

Kravchenko held out a sheet of paper, and waited until Serdyuk had read the name of the comrade and the address of the secret meeting place. Then he drew it back, and went on, unhurriedly, to expound his ideas on the methods of work best suited to this special assignment.

When Serdyuk came out of the secretary's office, Gayevoi, in the waiting room, hardly recognized him. Elation, mingling with a new, grave severity, had transformed his features.

"Thanks for your faith in me, Grigori Andreyevich," he said, seizing Gayevoi's hand and pressing it firmly. "Thanks, I won't let you down."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Train after train was despatched. Completing the dismantling and shipping of their equipment, the shops began to evacuate the last of the workers, who had stayed on to finish up the job. Many of them had not sent off their families. These were now first on the list for evacuation. For lack of sufficient boxcars, several crews worked day and night in the open-hearth shop, enclosing and roofing large flatcars, glazing windows, lining the walls with felt, and setting up wide plank benches along the sides. The evacuees were entrained right there, in the shop; and the teeming bay presented a strange sight, crowded with families on the move, littered with trunks, valises, sacks, and bundles.

Grey-bearded Pakhomich rolled up a barrel of dill pickles, and tried to drag it into one of the cars, despite the scolding of the women inside.

An explosion, distant, but ear-rending, hushed the women for a moment; and Pakhomich took advantage of their silence to shout:

"Silly fools! D'you think I want it for myself? We'll all eat pickles on the road. Better than leaving 'em for the Germans!"

No more objections were raised. The barrel was pulled into the car.

"It's the sort of thing you dream in nightmares," Makarov said to Krainev. They were walking along the charging level, behind the furnaces, where they could scan the teeming bay from end to end.

"Well, even in nightmares, I never dreamed such things as happened to me yesterday." Krainev returned, and went on to describe his conversation with Irina.

"She'll come to her senses yet, and follow on in another train," Makarov suggested hopefully.

"No," Krainev replied, with a bitter ring in his voice; "she's not the kind to do a stupid thing by halves."

"If she does decide to go," said Makarov, "you can take her out in a car and put her on our first train. It's stuck at the Novy siding, only seven kilometres out. That was as far as it could get last night, the junction's so badly jammed."

They had reached the door of the evacuation headquarters. Makarov nodded and turned back

down the level, while Krainev opened the door and went in.

Sergei Petrovich had not been cheered by his friend's effort at consolation. He knew that Irina would not leave. Still, he went to the telephone and dialled his apartment. He waited long and patiently, but there was no answer.

No sooner had he laid down the receiver than the telephone rang sharply.

"Who's there?" a voice shouted into his ear; and before he could answer, it hurried on:

"A bomb hit our train at the siding. The cars are on fire."

Krainev spent no more time listening.

A few minutes later, he was speeding towards the siding in one of the ramshackle old cars still left at the works garage. The driver needed no urging, for he, too, had sent off his family on that night's train. The car lurched desperately along the cobbled road, and Sergei Petrovich had to brace his feet firmly on the floor to keep from flying out.

From a rise in the ground, they caught sight of the siding. All the tracks were occupied by waiting trains. The front cars of one of the trains were on fire.

Now the road lay downhill, and the going was smoother. As the distance decreased, Krainev

could make out more details: people working around the burning cars, and the dead and wounded lying beside the tracks.

The driver stopped the car.

"It's not our train," he said, brushing the perspiration from his forehead. "There's a sleeping car for the sick in ours, and there's none in this."

Screams and moans hung over the siding. The driver cranked the car and took it closer to the tracks. People came running towards it.

A young woman ran up, with a wounded child on one arm. Her other arm hung limp, streaming with blood. Her face was distorted with horror. Just as she reached the car, her strength failed her, and she dropped into the roadside dust. Krainev sprang out and lifted mother and child into the car.

Another child was brought up, with a bullet wound through the neck. Two men brought a boy of about ten, in a blue sailor suit, with his right hand torn off at the wrist.

Sergci Petrovich looked up and down the tracks, seeking out the train in which Elena Markarova had left. It was nowhere to be seen. Evidently, it had gotten through.

Everywhere lay the dead and wounded: children, women, the sick and the aged. Scores of people were running towards the car.

"Sergei Petrovich! I'm leaving!" the driver shouted.

Turning, Krainev found that his place in the car, beside the driver, was occupied by a man with a baby in his arms. The child was dead, but the man was shouting frantically at the driver to rush them to the hospital.

"Go ahead," Krainev told him. "I'll walk."

At the last moment, however, he swung onto the running board.

Cars, trucks, ambulances whizzed past the returning car, racing out from town towards the siding.

As the car turned into town, Krainev jumped off. His legs were shaking.

"I'm just tired, from riding outside," he told himself. Sinking onto a bench outside a nearby house, he tried to light a cigarette. The match flame danced in his trembling fingers.

"The nation that gave the world Schiller, and Goethe..."

Irina's words echoed in his ears, and his anger against her blazed into sudden fury. If he could drag her out to that siding, and make her look at it! He thought of his son, with surging anxiety. Who could tell whether the same fate might not befall the train that carried him, at the very next siding?

When Krainev got back to the works, he was informed of an order forbidding shop and department heads to leave the territory. He smiled wryly. The order did not change much. As it was, he had spent days and nights on end at work in the shop.

Pausing on the stairs to the teeming bay, Krainev stood watching a group of workers on the bridge of the last crane. Suddenly, something dropped from the crane and struck the floor with a dull, but heavy thud. Krainev ran down the stairs and joined the group of men collected where it had fallen. They made way for him, and he saw a motor, badly smashed, on a big heap of sawdust.

Bondarev smiled grimly.

"You must have thought it was one of the men," he said. "No. It was just this motor—the last one left. We used it to load all the other stuff, and then there was no way of getting it down. We had to simply push it off. The boys piled up some sawdust, thought maybe they could save it that way. But it was too heavy."

"It looks like we can leave now," said the foreman.

"Yes, you can all leave now," Krainev replied.

He shook hands with the workers, bidding them goodbye. The last to approach him was

Opanasenko, who, though refusing to evacuate, had worked on in the shop to the very last.

"There's still time to change your mind, Ippolit Yevstigneyevich," Sergei Petrovich told him.

"No," Opanasenko replied obstinately. "I've made my mind up, and I'm not going to change. I'll be waiting for you here."

Late that evening, Matviyenko searched Krainev out in the drafting department, now transformed into a makeshift dormitory.

"Well, comrade manager," he said, "goodbye! And good luck to you."

"Where are you off to?"

"The front."

"That's not so far," said Krainev, smiling cheerlessly. His eyes clouded over with envy.

"There's something I want to ask of you," Matviyenko said. "In the first place, don't forget Dmitryuk, out in the Urals. I promised to give him a hand. He's a fine old man. In the second place"—and he hesitated awkwardly—"help my wife out, if you can. She'll have a hard time of it, with three kiddies, and in the third place—apply for Party membership. I feel it's my fault if you don't. Can I depend on you?"

"Entirely, Mikhail Trofimovich."

"For all the things I've asked?"

"Every one."

"Including the last?"

"Including the last."

"That's fine! You know, I wish we were going together," Matviyenko said, with a sad note in his voice. "You'd make a splendid comrade in battle, I know, just as in work."

They shook hands silently.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Early next morning, all the shop and department heads were summoned to the director's office. They found Dubenko at his desk, with a cigarette, as always, between his teeth. Beside him sat a stranger in a travel-stained leather jacket, to whom he was listening with grave attention. When all had assembled, the stranger glanced about the room, from face to face, with eyes that expressed nothing but weariness.

"I've called you in to hear a lecture on technique," Dubenko said. "Comrade Brovin will deliver it."

"A lecture on technique—with the Germans at the door," Krainev reflected irritably.

The man in the leather jacket did not get up from his chair. In a low, even voice, he set forth to them the elementary rules for the handling of explosives.

"The order to blow up the works may come at any moment," he explained, "and I won't be able to manage it alone."

To illustrate his point, Brovin described to them a recent experience at another works. He had taken the entire task upon himself; but the order to destroy the works had come so late that when the Germans reached the gates he had still been dashing from shop to shop to fire the last remaining fuses. Luckily, he had left to the last the charge in the coal-crushing section of the boiler house; and this had been his salvation. Tons upon tons of powdered coal dust had been thrown into the air, sinking the whole works in impenetrable darkness. Losing his sense of direction, Brovin had groped along a wall, and finally tumbled into a water drain. The covered concrete gutter being dry, he had lain there quietly until evening. Then he had made his way out of the works, and had succeeded in getting back across the front line. Black as a chimney sweep, he had had to scrub his face industriously before he could convince the Soviet command that he was really the same man whose photograph was attached to his documents.

Brovin set the shop managers a definite task: they must know the location of all charges laid in their shops, and be prepared to fire these

charges, if necessary, without his assistance. He told them where and how the charges were to be laid, and what amount of explosive was to be used in each case. Anticipating the question that arose in every mind, he explained that this would not destroy the works completely, but would make its restoration a difficult and lengthy process.

"When we get back, we'll build it up again," he concluded. His lips curved in a smile; but there was no smile in his eyes. They had seen too much in the past few months.

"I must ask to be excused from this job," said Khmelnov, the chief mechanic, rising to his feet. "I'm not going to blow up the works."

"What do you mean—you're not going to?" Dubenko demanded indignantly.

"I can't do it."

"What is this, Khmelnov? Are you planning to stay behind?" Dubenko asked, screwing up one eye.

"No, comrade director, I'm leaving with all of you."

"You know Comrade Stalin's orders, to leave nothing to the enemy. Do you think that doesn't concern you?"

"Of course it concerns me. But ... well, I can't do it! Try and see it my way, Pyotr Ivan-

ovich," pleaded Khmelnov. "I've been at this works twenty years. Everything that's been built here in those years—I built it, had a hand in it. After all, you can't expect a father to kill his child. Can't it be done without me? It's just too hard—to build it all, and then destroy it, and then start building it up again from scratch."

"If you think you're the only one that finds it hard, you're very much mistaken," Dubenko returned coldly. But, unexpectedly to all, he added: "Very well. You're excused."

The listeners wondered as to his motive. Had he been softened by the mechanic's plea, or lost faith in him, or simply realized that, in any case, he would not obey the order to blow up any part of the works?

Khmelnov bowed his grey head and sat down, sighing heavily.

The laying of the charges was begun immediately after this conference.

An oppressive hush hung over the works. With the exception of the guards and the handful of shop and department heads, there was not a soul on the territory.

Their footsteps echoed hollowly in the stripped and deserted shops. Only the jackdaws were noisy and happy, flying about from stack to stack,

and settling fearlessly on the gas bleeders of the blast furnaces.

Trucks brought the ammonite to the shops, from a storehouse just outside the wall dividing the works territory from the open steppe.

Past the storehouse, men and women from the town, loaded with packs and bundles, were trudging Eastward: down the slope of the gully, across the brook, up the far slope, and out into the rust-brown autumn steppe.

The last train had left at dawn; and the stragglers were following on foot.

Krainev, with two assistants, heaped up the cases of ammonite brought to his shop in five neat piles, one under each of the furnaces. By the time they were done, all three were ready to drop with fatigue. Brovin came in, examined their work critically, and thrust the detonators into place, carefully measuring the fuses. Guards were then posted at the furnaces. From the open-hearth shop, Brovin led the shop managers on a tour of inspection of all the points marked for destruction, ending up at the power station the farthest removed of all the buildings on the works territory. Here they found no sign of preparations. Brovin turned furiously on Lobachov, demanding:

"Why haven't you mined the station?"

"It was mined just as soon as the works shut down," Lobachov replied tranquilly.

"Where? How? What charge?"

"There's a concrete channel under the generator, where the cables run. The cable channel. We put a charge of ammonite in there."

"How much?"

"Two tons."

"Can that be checked?"

"It can, of course. Only it's been bricked up and coated with concrete."

"What on earth for?" Brovin asked, a strange spark flickering and dying in his tired eyes.

"To direct the explosion upwards, and increase its force."

"How will you set it off?"

"I'm having wires run right now to a switch in the administration building."

"You're complicating things unnecessarily," said Brovin, his eyes fixed intently on Lobachov. "You pile up some ammonite right here—one ton in this niche, and one in this." He chalked two crosses, beside niches in the concrete bed of the generator. "And remove that wiring of yours immediately. It's dangerous. If there should be a short circuit on the line, the place will go up in the air, with all the people in it."

Again a truck had to be sent out to the storehouse.

When the explosive had been piled in place, and the fuses laid, Polynov, the glum, lanky commander of the works guards, told the watchman at the door:

"Admittance only to Comrades Lobachov and Brovin."

"Or persons knowing the password," Brovin added.

"Why so?" asked Polynov, in evident surprise.

"A necessary precaution. In case anything should change."

Polynov took the watchman aside and whispered the password in his ear.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The works despatcher's roomy office was stuffy with tobacco smoke. Though full of people, it was very quiet. Kerosene lanterns, set about on the desks, threw a strange, flickering, yellow light on the walls and floor. In one corner lay a pile of sheepskin coats. In another, rifles leaned against the wall.

Makarov sat, half asleep, beside the despatcher, who had been on duty since morning of the

day before. At another desk, Khmelnov and his assistant were at work over the lists of evacuated equipment. The senior cashier lay fast asleep by the wall, beside a sack of money. Having paid off the last of the workers, early that morning, he had cleared out his safe and come to join the others in the despatcher's office. People sat and lay about everywhere, at the desks and even on the floor, though there were plenty of camp beds in the next room. A long table, squeezed in among the beds, was heaped with bread and sausage: but nobody could eat.

This room was the only spot in the works which still continued to function--a heart, beating without a body. From here, the telephone lines branched out: direct wires for communication with the guards, and other wires, stretching across the murky steppe to neighbouring works and to the regional centre.

Not for many years had the Donbas known a night so dark as this. Even through the blackout, the murk of the steppe had been relieved by the glow hanging over the iron and steel plants. Tonight, darkness reigned over all.

Clearly, this was to be the last night in the works. The clock on the wall pointed a quarter to ten. Time dragged with sickening slowness.

Dubenko came in, pale and unshaven, with sunken cheeks.

"Have the lines checked," he told the superintendent of the telephone exchange. "I can't get connected with the Deputy People's Commissar. He's in the next town."

The director looked around the room, evidently making a mental roll call. He seemed about to say something, but changed his mind and did not speak. Sitting down beside the despatcher, he began to leaf the evacuation records.

"How many of our engineers and skilled personnel have left?" he asked.

"Six hundred and eighty, out of seven hundred and two," the despatcher replied, without looking into his lists.

"Did Valsky leave?"

"Yes, but they say he disappeared before the train reached Debal'tsevo."

The exchange superintendent returned, and reported that contact with the neighbouring towns was lost due to damage somewhere on the line.

After a moment's hesitation, Dubenko ordered Makarov to take a car immediately and report to the Deputy People's Commissar for instructions. Following Makarov out of the room, he added:

"Only hurry back as fast as you can, or the Germans will find us still waiting here for orders."

Again silence fell in the despatcher's office. Even Khmelnov put away his lists and sat motionless, sunk in thought. The clock ticked monotonously on. At the hour, there was a hissing of springs, then again the steady ticking. The striking mechanism had been stopped, because every unnecessary sound set people's taut nerves tingling.

But the hush, too, was a nervous strain. Krainev thought of getting up and walking up and down the room; but his aching muscles protested. Half a year's intensive work, the last few sleepless days and nights, the innumerable cases of ammonite he had carried on his back that day, were making themselves felt.

If he could only sleep! But sleep would not come. And he lay staring up at the ceiling, listening to the ticking of the clock. Brovin, beside him, sighed in his sleep.

The telephone rang. The despatcher lifted the receiver, and immediately called to Krainev:

"Sergei Petrovich! Your shop electrician's out at the gate. He wants to come in."

"I thought he'd left," said Krainev perplexedly. "Well, let him through."

Pivovarov launched into rambling and protracted explanations of how he had missed the last train and been left behind.

"You could have gone on foot," said the despatcher, interrupting this endless tale.

"And how far would I get?" Pivovarov demanded reproachfully. "I got a bullet in my leg way back in the Civil War, and it's been bothering me ever since."

Relenting somewhat, the despatcher said:

"All right, all right. We'll find truck room for you somehow."

Pivovarov left. The despatcher dozed off at his desk.

The exchange superintendent came in again, announcing that the men he had sent to repair the line had found the wires removed and the insulators smashed on several posts just outside the town.

"Does Dubenko know?" asked the despatcher, wide awake at once.

"Yes. He's sent for Gayevoi, and asked the telephone operators to search out Boyenko—he's somewhere in town."

The telephone rang shrilly, awakening all but Brovin.

"Let him through, in his car," the despatcher said into the telephone. His face was pale. Put-

ting down the receiver, he told the anxious listeners:

"A messenger from the Deputy People's Commissar."

Nechayev glanced significantly at Khmelnov.

They heard the hum of the engine, and the scream of the brakes as the car was pulled up sharply at the entrance. Then, hasty footsteps on the stairs, and the opening and closing of the director's door. A moment later, the director's hurried step in the corridor brought almost everyone to their feet.

Dubenko came in.

"Set off the charges immediately," he said—and his voice caught in his throat. "The order's come a little late. They couldn't reach us by phone, so they had to send a messenger."

Again the telephone rang. The operator was searching for the director; but Dubenko only shrugged. The despatcher plugged in the phone loudspeaker.

It was the commander of an Army rearguard detachment. Reporting that German tanks and mobile infantry were outflanking the town from the South, he ordered that the works be blown up at once.

"Hurry, hurry," Dubenko urged. "Where's the sapper?"

Somebody woke Brovin. The second or two that passed while he rubbed his eyes seemed an eternity. Starting up, he said tersely:

"Each takes his own shop. I'll help in the open-hearth—there's five charges there. Send someone out with Lobachov. And call in the guards."

He and Krainev ran towards the open-hearth shop. The rays of their flashlights came back at them from tracks and ties, from heaps of ingots, from glistening puddles.

"You take the first two," Brovin shouted. "I'll take the rest."

Krainev stopped by No. 2 furnace, waiting for Brovin to reach No. 5. Soon Brovin's voice came to him hoarsely from the depths of the shop:

"Fire!"

Krainev set a lighted match to the end of the fuse.

A thin tongue of flame licked out, hissing fiercely. Stumbling, Krainev hurried to No. 1 and fired the fuse there. Then, his head sunk between his shoulders, in momentary expectation of explosion, he ran out of the shop and made for the administration building.

The open-hearth shop was the closest, and Krainev was the first to return. He found Dubenko, Khmelnov, and the despatcher silently waiting. Nodding in response to Dubenko's enquiring

glance, Krainev noticed the nervous knots of muscle on the director's cheeks. Khmelnov sat with bowed head.

Two explosions, almost simultaneous, rocked the walls. The floor shook, and there was a tinkling of broken glass. The blinds blew up like sails. One of them tore its fastenings and dropped to the floor.

"No. 2 and No. 5," flashed through Krainev's mind.

A few seconds later, new explosions sounded, in rapid succession. Papers flew from the desks. The lanterns flickered.

One by one, the shop managers returned, morose and grimy. Gayevoi came in, followed by Polynov. Brovin, moaning between clenched teeth, was brought in on somebody's shoulders. He had caught his foot on a rail and wrenched his ankle. They laid him on the floor.

The last to appear was Nechayev, who had been sent with Lobachov to the power station.

"Did you fire the charges?" Dubenko asked.

"Of course."

"Both of them?" asked Brovin.

"Yes, of course."

"Who fired them?"

"I fired one, and Lobachov the other."

"Where's Lobachov?" Dubenko wondered.

Nechayev looked around the room.

"I don't know," he said. "He ran off ahead of me."

There was a silence. The works doctor, kneeling beside Brovin, unlaced his shoe and examined his ankle. Five painful minutes dragged by.

Raising himself on his elbow, Brovin said:

"Comrade director, the charges at the power station can't have been set off. The detonators were carefully checked. They couldn't have failed."

All eyes turned to Nechayev.

"Why didn't you set them off?" the director thundered.

"Pyotr Ivanovich, I did, and so did Lobachov. We each fired one fuse," Nechayev returned, pale with the realization that he was not believed.

"Polynov will go. Krainev, and..."

Dubenko paused, looking around the room.

"And I," said Gayevoi.

"Take these along. They may be needed," said Brovin, holding out a bundle of fuses and detonators.

Krainev was standing closer to Brovin than the others. He took the fuses, and ran out together with Polynov and Gayevoi.

Again the flashlight rays, skipping along rails and ties. There was the power station. Up the stairs, in at the door, down the passage. The

niches in the concrete bed. Both fuses were fresh and clean, showing no signs of fire.

"Scoundrels!" muttered Gayevoi. He put a match to the near fuse, and it took fire instantly.

Krainev ran to the other niche, and fired the second fuse.

They all ran out together; but Krainev soon fell behind. He was so tired that his heart kept stopping.

Suddenly, behind him, he heard the sound of a door being opened and shut.

"Who can it be?" he wondered. "Could Dubenko have sent someone else to help us out? Or maybe it's Dubenko himself, or Boyenko?"

Whoever it was, he would fly up into the air together with the station. Krainev turned, hoping against hope to make it there and back before the explosion.

The fuses were timed to burn ten minutes.

Pivovarov was standing beside the near niche, with a pair of scissors in his hand. On the floor lay two charred and smoking bits of fuse. He started at Krainev's appearance. For an instant they stood staring silently at one another. Then Krainev, bending swiftly, lifted a heavy wrench from the floor.

"Are you mad, Sergei Petrovich?" cried Pi-

vovarov, evidently frightened. "There's orders not to blow up the station!"

"Whose orders?" Krainev demanded, hardly believing his ears.

"Dubenko's," said Pivovarov, more calmly. "There's been a mistake, Sergei Petrovich. It's our own troops that are coming up. Here's the order."

He held out a sheet of paper, torn from the director's memorandum pad. It bore three words: "Stop explosions, Dubenko."

Krainev knew the signature well. There was no mistaking it. His head in a whirl, he leaned weakly against the piled explosive, thinking:

"A fine mistake! The whole works blown up for nothing!"

And the rent outlines of the open-hearth furnaces seemed to rise before him.

"Well, let's be going," he said, pulling himself together.

"No," Pivovarov returned. "I'll stay and keep guard here. The watchmen will soon be coming, but in the meanwhile we can't leave the place alone."

There was a happy ring in his voice.

Striding back along the ties, Krainev reflected:

"Our own troops! And how are we greeting them? A mistake! Shooting's too good for people that make such mistakes!"

He hastened his steps, drawing new energy from his grim anger.

Suddenly, a burst of machine-gun fire cut through the night.

"Queer! Our own troops. Then why should there be shooting?" he wondered, with swift suspicion.

Rallying his strength, he began to run. When he reached the administration building, it was hushed and deserted. Not a living soul, not a single car or truck at the entrance. He stopped short, in complete bewilderment. The flashlight fell from his lax grip and went out. Again suspicion, a frightful suspicion, filled his brain. But he shook his head. He could not admit such thoughts.

An automatic rifle was discharged, somewhere very near. Krainev looked up. A column of trucks was rolling in through the open gates. The leading cars sped past along the asphalt driveway towards the shops. The last few slowed down on the approach to the administration building. Only now did Krainev realize that they were German.

He stood motionless, pressed against a corner of the building, paralyzed with shock. Then he began to run, heavily, stumbling over the ties in the darkness, breathless with effort and weariness, choking with fury.

"Idiot!" he exclaimed aloud. "Fooled like a baby!"

Then, stopping suddenly:

"But Dubenko's signature. How'd he get Dubenko's signature?"

And again he was running, fighting down his overpowering exhaustion, crying desperately:

"They won't get away with it! I'll blow it up!"

He found the passage flooded with a fitful light. Yellowish, translucent smoke was creeping along the floor. This was strange; but Krainev wasted no time on wonder. He ran on to the generator. The cases of ammonite piled up in the niches were on fire. At first he could not understand why there was no explosion. Then he recalled that ammonite explodes only by detonation. He pulled a fuse and detonator from his pocket. The outer door banged several times in succession.

Quickly, he threw the detonator into the fire. Falling onto the burning lid of the uppermost case, the detonator exploded immediately; and that was all. He put a hand into his pocket for another, although he understood that it could do no good. But at this moment heavy footsteps sounded behind him. Dodging past the burning cases, he ran to the nearest window and tumbled out through the broken glass.

He could not get up. His knee, bruised in the fall, pained him severely. But he crawled away through the darkness, careless of direction, anxious only to get away from the power station and the Germans inside it. No one pursued him. The soldiers had evidently stopped to put out the fire. But he crawled on as rapidly as he could. At length he reached the street wall, and, after some search, found a breach formed during the last air raid. Through this he climbed out onto the sidewalk.

Here his strength deserted him. Sitting on the curb, his back against a post, he stared in through the breach in the wall, in expectation of pursuit.

Suddenly a ray of light slid over the pavement and up the walls of the houses opposite. Turning, Krainev saw tanks, in dim outline, at the end of the street. He had never imagined that they might come from that direction.

He crawled across the street, and in at somebody's gate. Lying flat on the ground behind the fence, he watched the tanks rumble by.

They disappeared; but it was a long time before he could make himself get up.

Finally, he crossed the yard, which backed against the park. Climbing through a hole in the fence, he found himself in the shelter of the

trees. Here he recalled that the house in which he lived also backed against the park; and he struck across the grass towards home.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Trains, trains without end. Some, carrying machine tools. turbines, harvester combines. motors, tractors, cranes, sowing machines, huge machine parts. structural iron shapes of every kind, and glum, silent people—rolling East. Others, carrying guns, planes, trucks, caissons, tanks, field kitchens, and noisy Army men—rolling West.

The West-bound trains were expresses, speeding almost without pause past the congested stations, past the once sleepy by-stations, now awakened to vigorous life. Sometimes they occupied both tracks, and all the East-bound trains stood still.

Then the people who were travelling East would camp and cook; and the stations would be veiled in the smoke of countless fires.

The railway lines were littered with ashes and excrement, with smashed cars and locomotives. Fresh graves appeared beside the station buildings. And still, with every day, more and more trains moved East.

People travelled in passenger cars and box-cars; in hopper cars, rudely equipped for habitation; on open flatcars, protected from the weather by improvised shelters thrown up of boards and snow shields and roofed with blankets or, more often, with straw. Many rode under the open sky: on the roofs of the crowded cars: on tenders; on the high-piled freight.

Some—the majority—travelled in organized groups. These knew that work awaited them in plants and factories—for some, in the Ural forests; for others, in the steppes of Kazakhstan, or the Siberian tundra. Others travelled without organization or definite goal; but these, too, knew that work awaited them.

It was a great, unparalleled migration of plants and factories, towns and villages. The whole Soviet Union seemed to be on wheels, moving part East, part West.

At first it seemed to Elena Makarova that strict plan and schedule existed only for the troop trains; but after a few days she began to see that the movement of the East-bound traffic, too, was controlled by definite rules and principles. Thus, the trains carrying evacuees were invariably sent through at the first possibility, in preference to all others. At times, indeed, Elena felt rather guilty at the realization

that her train, with its burden of women and children, of the sick and the aged, was pushing far ahead of the machinery and equipment so badly needed in the East. Such is the unalterable Soviet principle: human lives come first; and it was never abandoned, through the grimmest days of trial.

The cars grew more and more crowded. Husbands and fathers, leaving the works as the dismantling drew to completion, began to catch up with their families. Hearing the joyful cries of greeting at the door, Elena would stiffen in eager expectation. Perhaps, this time, it would be Vasili? But Makarov did not come. Nobody came, of the group which had remained behind to blow up the works.

The new arrivals brought alarming tidings of the sudden seizure of the town. Elena's spirits fell perceptibly, and the children, sensing her mood, grew subdued and silent. Victor stopped asking when they would be going home; Vadim put fewer and fewer questions about his father.

Gradually, a daily routine took shape. The fathers of families would disappear of a morning, to return, hours later, laden with provisions. Mothers travelling without their husbands received supplies from the emergency store which had been loaded on the train before de-

parture. How Elena's heart bled when she was entered on the list for these supplies!

Now and again, there were quarrels in the car. Elena found it hard to understand how people who had lost so much could quarrel over trifles: a milkpan, perhaps, or the use of the stove for cooking.

Not all were equally prepared for the exigencies of travel. Some had taken with them from home only the barest essentials; others had dragged along almost everything they owned. This was an important factor in their present situation.

Elena Makarova had prepared for departure alone, without advice or assistance. Her husband had barely had time to put her and the boy onto the train and bid them a hasty farewell. And now she was beginning to realize the significance of all the trifles she had left behind. Thus, for lack of a container of any sort, she could buy the children no milk.

Observing the life of her fellow passengers, Elena found that many others were as badly off as she. One of these was Maria Matviyenko, a quiet young woman with three small children on her hands; another, Pakhomova.

During one of their stops—the train stood still a good half of the time—Elena proposed that such things as pots and pans, hatchets.

bottles, mugs, be used by all in common, regardless of ownership. There was some grumbling and dispute; but in the end, the minority yielding to the majority, this proposal was adopted. Things became a little easier.

And then assistance came from an altogether unexpected quarter. One day, when Elena took the children out for a walk during a protracted stop, she was approached by a grim-looking old man in a sheepskin coat.

"Are those children yours?" he asked, knitting his heavy grey brows.

"Why, yes," Elena answered, at once surprised and alarmed.

"That one too?" he persisted, nodding at Vadim.

"That one too."

"But isn't he Sergei Petrovich's little boy?"

Flushing, Elena answered:

"Yes, he's Sergei Petrovich's son."

"Just what I thought!" said the old man, chuckling: and he strode away, leaving Elena to puzzle, vaguely alarmed, over the incident.

Next day he came into her car, grunting with effort as he climbed the steep iron steps. Silently, he set down on the plank bench beside the children a bottle of milk and a small basket of apples.

"Who are you?" asked Elena, deeply touched.

"Grandad," he returned, smiling. "You're the lad's mother, now. Well, and I'll be his grandad."

When the old man—it was Dmitryuk—had gone, Victor said loudly:

"D'you know who that is, mama? It's Grandfather Frost, only he's shaved off his beard!"

Everyone laughed. From that day forth, Dmitryuk was known in car No. 2 as "Grandfather Frost."

The old man made his appearance daily. Where and how he got the milk, nobody knew; but it was clear that the getting was not easy.

One day he did not come until evening. He seemed tired and upset.

The milk he brought had curdled; and, shamefacedly, he was compelled to tell the story of the day's adventures. He had bought the milk early that morning, in a village some distance from the station where the train was standing. When he got back, the train had already left. Only by climbing onto the tender of a hospital train had he managed to overtake it.

Soon a second Grandfather Frost appeared, taking charge of Maria Matviyenko and her children. True, the new "grandfather" could boast neither beard nor moustache, and his eyes

had a youthful, almost boyish gleam; but he yielded in no way to Dmitryuk in the fulfilment of his duties. This was Shatilov. Recognizing Maria at one of the stations, he immediately volunteered to assist her, even moving into car No. 2 to be on hand in case of need-- an invasion which at first caused some dissatisfaction among the other inhabitants of the car. Within a day or two, Shatilov doubled his responsibilities, undertaking to provide for Pakhomova as well. After this, there were no more reproaches.

Dmitryuk was always sorely vexed when he failed to bring in as rich booty as the strong, active young Comsomol foreman. To spare the old man's feelings, Shatilov made it a rule to share with him.

One day, at a by-station where they seemed likely to be held up for several hours, both tracks being occupied by West-bound troop trains, the train commander called a meeting of all the bachelors on board. Some seventy men gathered beside the locomotive, and the commander had to climb onto the cab ladder to make himself seen and heard. He was a member of the works trade union committee—one-armed and elderly, but full of youthful energy.

"You all know Dmitryuk, don't you?" he began.

"Sure," a number of the men replied.

"And Shatilov?"

"Of course," came the unanimous response. Shatilov's was a name that had gained recognition throughout the works.

"And do you know why car No. 2 calls both of them Grandfather Frost?"

That nobody knew, and the train commander went on to explain the origin and significance of the nickname. Then, bracing his shoulder against the ladder to free his only hand, he pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket and read off the names of the women on the train, travelling with children, whose husbands had not overtaken them. He proposed that the bachelors undertake to help them out.

"What a bright idea!" someone shouted. "We've got our own selves to feed. All they give us bachelors on the train is bread, and now one-arm wants us to feed the whole works!"

Loud shouts and hisses drowned the dissenter's voice.

The train commander raised his arm.

"Who knows Vasya Buroi?" he demanded cheerfully.

"We all know him!" the bachelors responded.

"Well, then, what are you yelling about, if you do? There's nothing to get excited over.

Vasya has to grumble—that's his way. But he'll do the job. Is that right, Vasya?"

"Did you and me ever say wrong?" Vasya returned.

And the shouts gave place to laughter.

The train commander continued:

"I'm appointing Dmitryuk commander of the Grandfather Frost brigade. And for commissar"—he looked earnestly from face to face—"for commissar, each of you has your own conscience."

He sprang down to the ground.

That same day the members of the new brigade set about their duties, each to the extent of his abilities.

The days passed without alarms. By night, however, German planes would appear, bombing and strafing the lines. At big stations, they were kept off by furious antiaircraft fire; but at small by-stops, and on the stretches between stations, they had less to fear.

Sometimes two or three nights would pass quietly, and people would begin to think the danger zone was past. But then the planes would come again.

One night, out in the open steppe, several of the rear cars were set on fire by incendiary bombs. One of the burning cars contained the works draft files. Soon the cases in which the drafts were

packed began to catch. There was no water within reach.

The workers fought frantically to save the precious drafts, smashing the sides of the car, dragging out the heavy cases, trying to smother the flames with blankets, clothing, soil—all to no avail. The files would have been reduced to ashes, had not the engine driver from the train behind come to the rescue. Uncoupling his locomotive, he brought it racing down the track and sprayed the burning cases with water from his engine pump. Most of the drafts were saved.

The next day was a gloomy one for car No. 2.

Shatilov did not show up at all. With severe burns of the face and arms, he lay in the sleeping car reserved for the sick, in excruciating pain, wondering whether his sight could be saved, or whether he would be blind for life.

Dmitryuk came up to the door and called Elena. He held his blistered hands clumsily away from his body, the fingers spread. His eyebrows and half of his moustache were gone, but the scorched half that remained bristled as valiantly as ever.

"No milk for the boys today," he said sadly. But Elena was more concerned over his crippled

hands, and singed moustache. Noting her anxious glance, he told her comfortingly:

"Don't you worry about the whiskers. They'll grow back. Maybe they'll come black again--or red, for all I care. Anything's better than grey! And my hands will heal, too. It may not be far to the Urals, but we'll be a long time getting there."

And, before Elena could say a word, he strode away to his own car.

The boys were not left without milk, however. Dmitrevuk's duties were taken over by Vasili Buroi. Vasili, too, had burns about the face; but his hands were unharmed.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Dubenko and his shop and department chiefs headed on several trucks for Stalingrad. For eight days and nights they pushed on--overtaking and leaving behind long lines of carts and wagons, flocks of sheep, herds of cattle and horses--stopping only when heavy night rains made the country roads impassable.

The first day or two, Dubenko slept like the dead. Only the sound of distant bomb explosions, bound up for months with poignant anxiety for

the safety of the works, roused him now and again to consciousness; and even then, after one glance at the steppe around him, he would soon relapse into his heavy sleep. When a German plane swooped down to gun them, he did not even stir. His neighbours had to drag him bodily out of the truck to the comparative safety of the ground.

Gayevoi rode in the leading truck, beside the driver. As before, he slept neither day nor night. The memory of the power station gave him no peace. He could not understand what had become of Krainev, could not forgive himself for leaving a comrade behind. But there could have been no question of waiting. German mobile infantry had appeared at the end of the street, making escape or capture a matter of seconds. Dashing, with extinguished headlights, out of the works gates and into a nearby side street, the trucks had emerged safely into the steppe.

They did not get as far as Stalingrad. In Morozovskaya, a big Cossack centre, with broad streets and roomy houses backed by spreading orchards, their trucks, rifles, and ammunition were requisitioned by passing military units. Nothing remained of their baggage but a sack of money and a big bottle containing the remnants of the alcohol that had been shared out during night

encampments under the pouring rain. The money was soon turned in at the bank, and the alcohol shared out. for the last time, at their bivouac beside the railway warehouse.

After brief discussion, it was decided that Dubenko head straight for Sverdlovsk, where the People's Commissariat was now situated. and Gayevoi for Moscow, to report to the Party Central Committee. The rest were either to remain in Morozovskaya until the trains that carried their families came up, or, as some preferred, to travel back along the line to meet them.

"What am I to say about the power station?"

This was Dubenko's only thought, all the way to Sverdlovsk. The trip did not take him long. At Gumrak, just beyond Stalingrad, he noticed a hospital train on the tracks the fastest type of East-bound transport; and the surgeon in command of it turned out to be the former head of the town military hospital, which Dubenko had accorded considerable assistance in the months before evacuation. Learning of Dubenko's difficulties, the surgeon gave him passage in his own compartment on the hospital train.

"What shall I say about the power station?" Dubenko asked himself again, as he entered the

crowded waiting room and requested the secretary to report his arrival.

Tactful and considerate, solicitous for the welfare of his subordinates, the People's Commissar, as Dubenko well knew, was at the same time relentlessly demanding. He was slow to impose punishment, to demote or remove men in responsible posts. When necessary, he would afford them every assistance and support. But once he became convinced that his support was no longer deserved, his sentence would be firm and rigorous. Men whom he had been compelled to remove were never again entrusted with responsibility on the same scale as before.

The secretary quickly returned and invited Dubenko into the office.

Rising as he came in, the People's Commissar held out a hand in greeting, and exclaimed:

"Good work! You're one of the first to arrive from the Donbas. We're waiting impatiently for that armour-plate mill of yours. We need it—well, like this!"—and the People's Commissar, always so sparing of gesture, drew a finger across his throat. "Yes, that bad. We'll start setting it up right away, at Rotov's. The building and foundations are almost ready. Which train is it on? Number three?"

"I . . . I think so."

"You think so?" The People's Commissar raised his eyebrows. "It's all right for me to say, 'I think,' with all the iron and steel plants of the South on wheels. It's your job to know."

He opened a folder stuffed with reports, and glanced through it quickly. Finding what he sought, he went on:

"Yes. Number three. Where is it now? Coming up?"

Dubenko felt a cold chill run down his spine as he replied:

"I don't know."

"You—what?"

"When I left Morozovskaya, none of our trains had come through there yet."

The People's Commissar was calm, very calm; but Dubenko saw the effort it cost him to restrain himself.

"Then what did you come all the way out here for?" he asked. "To report that you've arrived? What do I want with such reports?"

Dubenko did not reply. It seemed to him that the Commissar's eyes had grown deeper, blacker.

"What I need is your works. Your men. I need, and your equipment. And not only the ar-

mour-plate mill, either. 'They're expecting your generator at Tagil, and your cranes at Zlatoust. All the Urals plants could use your motors. What did you come here to tell me? That you're doing nothing, that you don't know a thing? Is that it?"

"Comrade People's Commissar..."

"Comrade director! A captain doesn't leave his ship until he's brought it safely into port. And you?"

Dubenko shivered. What would he not have given, at this moment, to have the People's Commissar shout and rage! Such bursts of wrath, he knew, were but short-lived; and while they lasted, the People's Commissar never decided important questions. His decisions, final and unbending, were reached only after calm and deliberate consideration.

The People's Commissar pressed a finger sharply down on the bell. The secretary came in and stopped beside his desk.

"My plane, immediately, and ship him off on it to Morozovskaya ... no, to Stalingrad. And don't let him in here again until he can report that all seven trains have reached their destinations."

And, without so much as a glance at Dubenko, the People's Commissar turned to his tele-

phone. Leaving the room, Dubenko heard him say:

"Connect me with the People's Commissar of Railways."

Now at one junction, now at another, he appeared: a lean little man, with a deep furrow between his eyebrows. He wore a leather jacket, never buttoned; and when the jacket front swung open people noticed a decoration on his breast. It was not long before the railway folk began to recognize him at sight.

He never named his position. The title of director of a no longer existing works was not likely to make much impression. In these times, the most obscure officials, at the least-known by-stations, were daily besieged by special messengers from Moscow, each urging the very special importance of his particular train, and trying to demonstrate that it must be sent through ahead of others.

Dubenko neither urged nor pleaded. He demanded, demanded even more flatly and peremptorily than he had at the works.

"I'm Dubenko," he would say to the station officials, as though this were a name they were in duty obliged to recognize and respect.

And the works trains began to make better progress.

To the director's infinite satisfaction, train No. 3 pushed ahead of the rest. Through the window of a station office, one day, he saw it coming up. There they were: the powerful stands of the armour-plate mill; the enormous rolls, their smooth surface thickly coated with grease; the tall, flat-topped motor, carefully boarded over.

Dubenko hurried to the platform; and just outside the station door, he collided with Makarov. Overjoyed at this meeting, for he had been deeply concerned over Makarov's fate, he swept the chief engineer into a hearty embrace. In describing his interview with the People's Commissar, however, he omitted many details.

Dubenko could not tell, as yet, what the future held for him. He had read his sentence in the eyes of the People's Commissar, and was very far from confident that this sentence might be rescinded, or even commuted, as a result of any success he might achieve in pushing through the trains. Nonetheless, he sped on, from station to station—demanding, reproaching, despatching telegrams in every direction.

"The maniac's headed your way," one station-master would warn another.

And, to avoid grappling with Dubenko, station after station would send his trains on before others, despite the pleadings of a dozen

special messengers, equipped with the most imposing credentials.

Through Dubenko's story, Makarov seemed rather impatient; and the moment the director paused, he hurried inside to the station office. Here he presented a telegram, signed by the People's Commissar of Railways, ordering that train No. 3 from Dubenko's works be sent through on a par with hospital trains. This telegram had been despatched to all the stations along the line, from Debaltsevo on.

Dubenko hung his head. Now he understood why No. 3 was forging ahead so rapidly. The People's Commissar was pushing it. He, Dubenko, had no hand in it.

"Oh, well," he reflected. "There's another six trains. I still have plenty to do."

Following Makarov out onto the platform, he asked him for the telegram. Makarov gave it to him willingly.

"I've got another," he explained. "I hooked it off the desk at one of the stations, just to have in reserve."

"Fine! Now every one of our trains will be No. 3. They'll have to let 'em through, and once they're through, I don't care what anyone says. Well, that's that. Now tell me how you got away."

Makarov related briefly how he had searched out the Deputy People's Commissar, only to learn from him of the seizure of the works. Then he had driven East, caught up with No. 3. and immediately set to work to push it through. Unfortunately, the train had raced without a stop past a crowded siding where, as it turned out, No. 1 was standing; and Makarov had thus missed his family.

Further on, however, he had met up with a worker from No. 1, who had told him a little about the life on the train, including the near-loss of the draft fiefs.

This worker was Vasili Buroi.

As the trains advanced further East, stops and delays had become much shorter, and members of the Grandfather Frost brigade had more and more often been left behind. Therefore, at Buroi's suggestion, new tactics had been adopted. If the Grandfathers found nothing to buy at the station where the train had stopped, they would no longer range afield. Instead, they would board the first East-bound train and ride ahead several stations. Then they could buy up provisions in nearby villages with no fear of being left behind, and, their baskets full, either wait for their train or ride back to meet it.

But there was one thing Buroi did not tell

the chief engineer. Victor had come down with typhoid fever, and had been shifted, with his mother, to the sleeping car. Vadim was now in charge of Dnistryuk, who no longer participated in the Grandfathers' excursions, but organized and directed their work, checking daily on their accomplishments.

Dubenko's talk with Makarov was soon interrupted, with no time for goodbyes. The station bell sounded, buffers clanged loudly, and No. 3 began to move. Makarov raced after it and sprang onto one of the cars.

From that day on, all the works trains moved faster. Each of them was labelled "No. 3." with the name of the works in big letters; the commander of each confronted officials at every station with a document identifying him as the commander of train No. 3 (this was easily done, since Dubenko carried with him the works seal and several pads of blanks); and, time after time, Dubenko insisted that this, indeed, was the genuine No. 3.

One after another, Penza sent through four such "No. 3's." The stationmaster groaned. How many more would there be?

In the end the director of the line lost his temper and ordered his assistant to bring the "maniac" to the line office the next time he appeared.

Dubenko evinced no particular enthusiasm at the prospect of an encounter with the line director; but he made no attempt to evade the invitation.

The office door opened, admitting a lean little man with a nervous face and fixed, unwinking eyes. At sight of him, the line director's indignation suddenly evaporated.

For some time he sat staring silently at Dubenko. Then he asked:

"Did you ever work in the Cheka?"

One of Dubenko's eyebrows shot up.

"I did," he replied.

"In Saratov?"

"In Saratov."

"Don't you remember me?"

Dubenko's other eyebrow shot up.

"Hold on! Our old commander? Well, well, you've certainly changed! Fattened up, even pads around the eyes. And I always thought a line director had a strenuous job!"

"You've gotten thin as a rail, yourself."

Dubenko shrugged.

"I was always like one of Pharaoh's lean cows," he said, sinking into a chair. "Only in those days I was twenty years younger."

"Yes, it's twenty years. It's a lot of water has flowed under bridges in all this time, and a lot of trains rumbled over them."

The line director's assistant, who had followed Dubenko into the room, was badly disappointed. He had expected quite a different reception for the "maniac," who had caused him more vexation than all the special messengers taken together.

"How many trains have you labelled No. 3?" the line director asked.

"Not many. There's only three left."

"Listen here, Dubenko! You were trained in the Cheka, after all!"

"Well, and if I was?"

"I don't know about you, but I, for one, can never forget what Dzerzhinsky told us: 'He who works in the Cheka must have a hot heart, a cool head, and clean hands.' And what have you? A hot heart, and an insane head; and your hands? Your hands are dirty. You're simply swindling. Seven trains, all No. 3! You're not the only one that needs to get through."

Dubenko flushed angrily. Jumping to his feet, he began to pace rapidly up and down the room.

"Everyone fights for himself, and it works for the good of all," he declared. "You tell me— what will decide the outcome of the war? Iron and steel!"

"And what about transportation? Do you think for a minute transportation's secondary?"

"And what are your rails made of? Wood? Who do you think I'm pushing our tyre turning lathes for, and our rail and structural mill? Who, do you think? Myself, maybe?"

"Where are you stopping?" the line director asked abruptly, noticing in Dubenko's eyes the feverish light that so appalled all the station officials.

"Betwixt and between four Penzas," Dubenko returned caustically. "The craziest town I've ever seen: four railway stations! By the time you tramp from Penza one to Penza four and back again, there's a day gone."

"Want a night's sleep?"

"What about my trains?"

"I'll send them through. But I'm going to wire both People's Commissars—yours and mine—and let them know the sort of tricks you're playing."

Getting up, the line director opened a door leading to an inner room.

"There's a cot in there, and some vodka in the desk drawer. Half a litre. It's been standing there two months and more. I take a sniff now and then, and it does me good. Take off your things and go to sleep."

He pushed Dubenko into the room and closed the door behind him.

"What shall I do about the trains?" asked his assistant, who had been listening to the conversation with growing interest.

"Let 'em straight through without a stop. The devil take them all! How can we tell which is really No. 3? He's the boss, and he numbers his trains as he pleases. Only write me out two telegrams to the People's Commissars. Let them puzzle it out themselves."

Two weeks later, the director and the chief engineer were admitted together into the office of the People's Commissar. He was talking over the telephone, and two more telephones waited, with receivers removed, for his attention.

Dubenko tried to make his step firm; but he was staggering with fatigue and worry.

Makarov's eyes were so dull and lifeless that the People's Commissar looked up at him in alarm.

"What's wrong, Comrade Makarov?" he asked, laying down his receiver.

"My little boy is dead. And my second is very ill."

Without waiting to be asked, the chief engineer dropped heavily into a chair.

"What with?"

"Pneumonia."

"I beg your pardon, Comrade Makarov, but I thought you only had one boy."

Makarov stared at the People's Commissar amazedly. How did he know? True, the subject of family had once come up, but only in passing.

He told the story of Vadim, and of Krainev's disappearance.

The People's Commissar asked his secretary to call in a consultant. While waiting, he returned to his telephone conversation.

Dubenko dozed in his chair. Makarov sat motionless, staring into the corner.

Vasili Nikolayevich had not seen the little grave, beside a distant siding in the steppe; but it floated always before his eyes.

The consultant came in. The People's Commissar finished his conversation, and, turning to the consultant, said:

"Find out who is the best children's doctor here in town. Put him on a plane and send him off with Comrade Makarov. Is sulphidine needed?"

"Badly!" exclaimed Makarov. "We can't get it anywhere."

"You'll be issued thirty grams from my special fund. Leave today. And come back when the boy is out of danger."

Turning to Dubenko, the People's Commissar went on:

"And you go straight to a hotel. Take five days' rest, and then we can talk."

A telephone rang. The secretary hurried in, exclaiming:

"Comrade People's Commissar, the Kremlin's on the line."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

From out the deserted shops it seemed to creep—the dead hush that blanketed the town. The rhythmic breath of the blowers, the pulse of the works, had ceased. The very air had changed. had lost its faint odour of gas; and even this odour, once detested, was now missed as an indispensable element of life.

The town had come into being together with the works, had grown as the works expanded. New blast furnaces had been built—and new houses had sprung up in the workers' settlement. Recreation rooms and dining rooms had been organized in the shops—and, in the town, there had appeared clubhouses and restaurants. The roads and paths on the works territory had been paved—and asphalt had covered the town's streets

and squares. Gay flower beds had been laid out on the works grounds, where weeds and junk had once flourished—and new parks and boulevards had grown up in the town.

The town had lived by the works and for the works. The town had been the rear-guard; the works—the front line, where the battle for steel raged furiously day after day, shift after shift. Every eight hours one army, after brief but strenuous combat, had been relieved by another army, rested and refreshed; and the achievements and failures of these armies had moved the town as the victories and reverses of an army at the front move the nation at home. The workers and engineers most highly esteemed in the shops had been the town's most honoured citizens. Their portraits had adorned the streets on gala days, beside the portraits of the country's leaders.

A typical Donbas town, its existence without the works was meaningless, impossible. The works was dead—and the town lay still and lifeless.

The nights had become darker, the days more cloudy. It was as though the streets had been flooded with slag. Every step was fraught with danger, as on a cooled slag crust, that may collapse underfoot at any moment.

It was very quiet. Even the dogs had slunk into their kennels, and gave no sign of life but

a plaintive whine now and again, as though they sensed an approaching wolf pack. Sometimes a lone shot rang out, or a short burst from an automatic rifle. The echo would carry far in the oppressive stillness, and the hearts of the townsfolk would contract in pain and sorrow.

The days were fearful. the nights more fearful still.

On one such murky night, a slender young girl made her way noiselessly along a street on the outskirts of the town, keeping close in the shadow of fences and walls, and pausing frequently to listen. Reaching a house with a low wooden porch, she glanced around her, and then tapped softly. The door opened, barely wide enough to admit her, and she slipped inside.

In a small, low-ceilinged room, faintly lit by a thread wick thrust into a bottle of oil, lay an old woman with bloated features. Looking up at the girl anxiously from under heavy, swollen eyelids, she asked:

"Is that you, Maria dear? Weren't you afraid, at this time of night? Has anything happened?"

"No, nothing special. I just wanted to have a talk with Valya," said Maria Grevtsova soothingly; and, changing the subject abruptly, she asked: "Who's taking care of your house for you, now you've left home?"

"Darya Vasilyevna's staying there. Only I'm so frightened Valsky might give her away. He can't forgive her that nickname she gave him-- 'beast number five.'"

When Valya had bolted the outer door, she led her friend into another room.

"Valya!" Maria whispered. "Do you know Krainev has stayed in town? He's betraying people to the Germans. and shooting them down himself, like dogs!"

Valya started back.

"It's a lie! It can't be!" she cried. But her voice quivered and broke.

Then Maria told her how, on the very first day of the German occupation - and from that day the town had begun a new and fearsome reckoning of time Krainev had appeared in the works settlement, accompanied by German soldiers, and started butchering the engineers who had remained in town.

Valya dropped limply into a chair.

Heartsick with watching her mother's rapid decline, she felt that she could not bear the pain of this new blow.

Maria continued, looking intently into Valya's eyes:

"I came specially to warn you to keep out of his sight, or he'll make away with you too. He

works it very skilfully, they say. The way he killed Lobachov!"

"Lobachov? Why Lobachov, in particular?"

Maria shrugged impatiently.

"Why, why, why! Go ask him, if you feel like swinging on a post by the market place. There were five hung there today."

Valya was too crushed to speak.

Krainev! How clearly she recalled his voice, pressing her to leave. And the nights in the shop, when German planes were overhead....

"Valya," Maria whispered, "you can help us out. Write him a note—ask him to come and see you. He'll be met, and...."

"Why must I write?"

"Didn't you tell me yourself, how he urged you to leave? Write that you need his help."

"No," said Valya dully, shaking her head determinedly.

"No?" Maria cried.

Valya was silent for some time. At length, pressing her head desperately between her hands, she murmured:

"I've got to make sure what it all means."

"What's there to make sure about, Valya?"

Maria asked, laying an arm tenderly over her shoulders. "It's all perfectly clear. Horribly clear. I can understand how you feel. You trusted him.

He won your heart, somehow. But you must overcome all that. Go to the table and write a note."

"No," Valya repeated, "I won't. I can't."

"You won't?" returned Maria indignantly. "In other words, you're willing to sit back and see us all strung up on lampposts?"

There was a silence. Then, with an effort, Valya whispered:

"I can't."

"Is that your last word to me?"

"Yes."

"And you call yourself an underground worker! Well, take care, Valya. Take care!"

Maria's voice had a warning, almost a threatening note. Turning sharply, she left the room.

"Maria," the old woman called from her bed. "Maria! Don't go out so late! Spend the night here with us."

But there was no reply. The bolt rattled briefly, and the outer door was opened and shut.

Valya sat motionless, her head bowed low.

The smoky wick on the table flickered and went out. Valya's mother was no longer moaning. Had she heard anything? Had she understood?

Faintly, the old woman called:

"Valyusha."

Valya went over to the bed, and sat down beside her mother.

"You must write that note, Valya," the old woman told her slowly. "Just think how many of our people he can betray! Bid your heart be still, and write. Perhaps he didn't really mean to stay behind, but once things have turned out so, he's trying to save his skin."

"Can it really be so?" Valya thought, with sinking heart. Aloud, she said, shaping the words with difficulty:

"I'll . . . see, mother."

She knew her mother's kind and trusting heart. And from that heart had come such grim and merciless judgment!

Moving away from the bed. Valya threw a shawl over her shoulders. She was shivering.

"Valyusha," the mother called again; and when the girl bent over her, she whispered faintly:

"Valyusha, you mustn't be lost on account of me. Spare me that sin. Go away from this town. You can't save me. I'm dying anyway. And Darya Vasilyevna will see me buried somehow. But your life is all ahead. The Germans will be driven out, I know. But until then? Here in town, someone will surely give you away. Valsky. or maybe Krainev. If you go somewhere else who can ever tell what and who you are?"

Gently, Valya smoothed the pillow. Choking down her tears, for her mother's sake, she slipped away into the other room. Her mother's days were numbered, as she could not help but see. Soon she would remain alone, entirely alone; for now, of course, her comrades would have nothing to do with her. How to win back their confidence, to prove her honesty? Comply with Maria's demand? No, that she would not do. Krainev could not have turned traitor. Valya knew he could not.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

When Krainev got home, that final night, he dropped onto a couch and for a long time lay motionless, utterly exhausted.

Gradually, however, his limp muscles began to recover their resiliency. And with returning strength came realization of the horror of all that had occurred: the power station undestroyed, and he himself left under German rule.

Krainev got up, rummaged in his pockets for matches, lit the oil lamp, and looked about him. Everything was just as he had left it: the bookcase, filled with volumes selected and accumulated in the course of many years; the desk, with some unfinished work lying open on it. A wrapper

of Irina's hung on the back of a chair. The thought of her flashed in his mind, and vanished.

His own study—but how alien now, what an appalling place for him to be in! His whole life here, the result of years of work and study, crushed in one instant.

His eye was caught by a large photograph of Vadim, an excellent piece of work. The child looked out of the frame at him with loving trust. His heart contracting painfully, he thought:

"I'll never see him again, never! And he—what will he, my son, know of his father? That I failed to carry out orders, and remained with the Germans!"

After a pause, he said aloud:

"Son of a traitor to our Motherland."

And, his hair bristling at the very sound of the words, he repeated:

"A traitor to our Motherland."

He recalled Dubenko, Makarov, Gayevoi. They had trusted him. And now? What must they think of him? What could they think of him?

The steppe rose before him, and his comrades, hastening Eastwards across it. They were on Soviet ground, among their own people. And he?

"What am I to do now?" he asked himself; and no answer came. He was gripped by the desire to disappear, to vanish from the face of the earth.

"If I had a revolver," he muttered desperately. Suddenly, through the night, came music, loud and gay.

What could it be? Where from?

Krainev went out into the hall, and then onto the staircase landing. The music came from Lobachov's apartment. Through the strained hush that hung over the building, loud voices sounded, followed by deep, familiar laughter—Pivovarov's.

"If I had a revolver!" Krainev whispered, trembling with fury; and this time the words had a new and different meaning.

For some time he stood on the landing, listening, uncertain how to proceed. A rumbling in the street outside interrupted his thoughts.

Returning to his study, Sergei Petrovich put out the lamp and cautiously raised a corner of the blind.

Tanks were rolling down the middle of the street. Mechanically, he began to count them. Behind the tanks came truckloads of mobile infantry.

Such a target, if only he had a grenade!

Suddenly a soldier in one of the trucks threw up his automatic and directed a long burst against the ground-floor windows. There was a crash of shattered panes. A woman screamed.

"It's begun," said Krainev, drawing away from the window.

Vividly realizing the tragedy of his situation, he puzzled once more over the question: what to do? Wait through the coming day, and at nightfall try to slip out of town? But where to? Perhaps - across the front?

Sergei Petrovich pictured to himself his meeting with his comrades from the works. They would crowd around him, shower him with questions. And what could he tell them? That he had let himself be fooled like a baby; that he had left the power station to the enemy, undestroyed! They would understand, of course, and believe; but that would not make it any easier. They had fulfilled their duty, and he had failed. He had shown himself the worst engineer at the works.

No, the worst in the whole Donbas.

In the plants of the Dnieper zone, he knew, everything of value had been either evacuated or destroyed; and the Zaporozhstal workers, dismantling and loading under artillery fire, had evacuated even the structural steel frames of their shop buildings.

Wait for nightfall? And could he be sure of living through the day? Pivovarov and Lobachov would unquestionably betray him.

"How did it happen?" he asked himself again and again.

Pacing up and down the room, he reviewed in memory every detail of the scene at the power station. Suddenly, he lit the lamp, and, taking the director's note from his pocket, held it up close to the light. The signature was genuine, beyond all doubt; but the text was forged. It had been written over the erased content of some old order signed by Dubenko.

Now it was clear. Pivovarov had twice snipped off the burning ends of the cords. He had had those scissors ready in his pocket, so as not to lose an instant. And in the end, after deceiving Krainev, he had pulled out the fuses and set the ammonite on fire.

At the thought of this calculated treachery, Sergei Petrovich gritted his teeth in helpless rage.

Again he paced up and down the room, lighting cigarette after cigarette. He could think of no practical solution.

And then a thought entered his mind: a solution so simple, so daring, so striking, that he screwed up his eyes, as though he had turned them on a stream of fiery, molten steel.

Early in the morning, Krainev slipped out of the house and turned up the street towards the

central part of the town. He was the first Soviet citizen to appear out of doors that day. German patrols stopped him several times, but let him pass on when he showed them a packet addressed to the Herr Kommandant.

Crossing the square, now crowded with tanks, Sergei Petrovich paused before the entrance to the town Soviet.

The long row of touring cars and motorcycles parked in front of the building confirmed his supposition that the Kommandantur would be quartered here.

*"Ich will sehen Herr Kommandant,"** he said to the two soldiers with automatics who barred his way.

The soldiers tried to question him. Making no reply to their enquiries, he repeated persistently, over and over, that he must see the Kommandant, must see him immediately.

A dandified young German officer, coming out of the building during this dispute, paused on the top step to listen. Then, quickly taking in the situation, he came down the steps and said a few words to the soldiers. Reluctantly, they stepped back. The officer, in turn, attempted to question Krainev; but he received no

* "I want to see the commandant."

other reply than the two words, persistently repeated:

“*Sehr nötig!*”*

In the end, however, Sergei Petrovich was compelled to hand over his packet. After a cursory glance at its contents, the officer ordered the soldiers to search the Russian. In one of his pockets, they found the fuses Brovin had given him the night before. These the officer took warily, between finger and thumb. Signing to Krainev to follow, he went inside.

Try as he might to keep his nerves under control, Krainev could maintain only a surface appearance of composure. His heart began to race as they entered the waiting room, where he was told to wait while his guide went into the inner office. The sense of reality was deserting him. He felt himself an observer, rather than a participant, of events.

Before he could pull himself together, the inner door opened, and the officer who had brought him invited him to enter.

The elderly German seated at the desk looked at Krainev silently, with tired eyes, for a moment or two. Krainev looked back at him in some surprise. There was nothing warlike about the

* “Very urgent!”

Kommandant's dull, commonplace features, nothing militant about his shapeless figure--nothing of the fascist beast Krainev had pictured. He looked a peaceful civilian, masquerading in uniform.

At length, breaking the silence, the German asked:

*"Was wünschen Sie?"**

"Ich weiss die Adressen Aktivisten und Kommunisten, und ich will sie schiessen."[†] Krainev replied the last of the answers he had memorized at home. Thus far, they had stood him in good stead.

The German's face expressed the most lively interest. He put some new question; but this time Krainev only shook his head helplessly. Then the Kommandant spoke in broken Russian:

"You can tell to me Russisch. Who you are?"

Krainev gave his name and position, adding that he had been ordered to blow up the power station, but had prevented its destruction and now turned it over to the German command. To illustrate his words, he pointed to the fuses taken from his pocket, which were now lying on the

* "What do you want?"

† "I know the addresses of active Soviet supporters and Communists, and I want to shoot them."

Kommandant's desk. Glancing at them doubtfully, the German demanded:

"How you can proof?"

"I've come to you. That's proof sufficient," Krainev returned, with an air of injured dignity.

Hurrying on, he explained to the Kommandant that he knew the addresses of active Soviet supporters and Communists who had remained in the town to carry on partisan fighting and wrecking activities; that he wished to destroy them, today, immediately, before they had time to do any damage.

"*Nein, nein!*"* exclaimed the German, shaking his head. "Not to destroy, to catch. Catch the end from the string, un-to-tangle the knot."

Sergei Petrovich frowned. The detention of Lobachov and Pivovarov would be altogether at variance with his plans.

"To catch—that is gut," the German continued rapidly. "We make to them a little bit massage, then they tell us much things. How many?"

"Two."

"How much marks per head?"

Krainev shuddered.

"Nothing. I want revenge," he declared, and his voice rang with unfeigned hate.

* "No, no!"

The Kommandant seemed surprised, but went on approvingly:

"What you need for to catch this partisans?"

"Two soldiers with automatics. and a revolver."

"*Nichts mehr?** That iss all?"

"Yes, that's all."

The Kommandant stared uncomprehendingly. But then, with a crafty smile, he said:

"You will catch by one und unexpected?"

"Yes. Separately, and by surprise."

"Hm. You understand gut the German school from war: by one und unexpected."

The Kommandant said a few words to the officer, who had been listening attentively. Then, turning back to Krainev, he told him:

"You can already ride."

"A revolver," repeated Krainev.

"You will not need. Offizier und soldat will be to help you."

"I'm not going without a revolver," Krainev insisted. "Why should I risk my life?"

The two Germans consulted together.

"Gut, then," said the Kommandant. "There you will be given."

In another few minutes. Sergei Petrovich found

* "Nothing more?"

himself in a car, with the officer and three soldiers, racing towards the settlement.

It was a warm, sunny day. The town lay hushed and still. Fallen leaves rustled softly under the wheels of the car.

"Does the officer know Russian?" Krainev wondered. And, remembering the attention with which the German had followed the talk in the Kommandant's office, he decided: "He probably does, a little. In any case, I must shoot fast, before Lobachov gets a chance to say a word. Besides, that scoundrel probably knows German pretty well. He was abroad for some time."

The settlement seemed entirely deserted. People kept to their houses, behind shuttered windows, afraid to stir into the street.

When they reached his house, Krainev signed to the driver to stop the car. He got out quickly and started up the stairs. The Germans followed close behind.

"My revolver," Krainev whispered to the officer, stopping before the door of Lobachov's apartment.

With evident reluctance, the officer handed him the weapon.

The soldiers were glancing warily, now at the door, now at their guide. The officer undid the flap of his holster.

The door opened slightly, and Lobachov's face appeared, crumpled with sleep. His nearsighted eyes were blinking nervously. At the sight of the Germans, he broke into a welcoming smile, and, removing the chain from its catch, threw the door wide open. Pivovarov, bloated after the night's carousals, stood behind him.

Krainev strode forward. Lobachov's wide smile faded, and his eyebrows flew up in amazement, over eyes round and glassy with fear. He opened his mouth to speak, but his tongue would not obey. Desperately, he tried to shut the door.

Then Krainev fired, straight into his face. Lobachov threw up his arms, as though seeking support, and sank to the floor.

Pivovarov fled down the hall into the rooms. Krainev aimed; but as he was about to fire, the officer jerked him back and seized his revolver. A tall, fat woman ran out of the rooms into the hall, screaming piercingly.

*"Geschwind nachjagen!"** the officer shouted.

The soldiers ran down the hall, but hesitated at the first door, fearing an ambush.

"He'll get away, the swine," Sergei Petrovich reflected angrily, wondering what was most to be

* "After him!"

feared: Pivovarov's escape, or his capture by the Germans.

Pivovarov had vanished as though into thin air. Search, as they might, in the building, the yard, and the adjacent streets, the Germans could not find him.

The officer was beside himself with fury. Showering curses on the soldiers, he seized Krainev by the arm and pulled him back to the car.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Krainev did not see the Kommandant again that day. Soon after the officer had left him in the waiting room. Soviet planes appeared over the town. Antiaircraft guns began to bark, and the Hitlerites scurried out of the building, seeking the shelter of the slit trenches in the back yard.

The Kommandant did not return to his office after the alert. Some official took Krainev's address and told him he could go home.

Coming into his rooms, Krainev felt only one desire: for sleep. He plunged without thought into his chilly bed.

Next morning, the same officer arrived to take him to the Kommandantur.

The swift drive through the crisp autumn air was refreshing; but it could not dispel Krainev's uneasiness. He entered the office with a nervous tremor, entirely uncertain as to what was awaiting him inside.

Colonel Pfaul, the Kommandant, greeted Krainev as an old acquaintance, pointing to a comfortable chair and offering cigarettes.

"No, Pivovarov hasn't been here so far," Krainev decided, relieved.

The colonel made no reference, however, to the events of the day before.

"You are need to me," he said, proceeding at once to business. "The radio station iss begin to work. Today, to six o'clock, you should to tell in the microphone how you are safe the power station und how you are catch the partisan. You should to tell for the population, advice to them, to help us so as you are help."

"But I'm a very poor speaker," Sergei Petrovich replied, realizing as he spoke that no such excuse could help him.

Mistrust flickered in the colonel's eyes.

"Cicero you are not, fery well I know," he said coldly. "Und the führer you are not. In the world iss not more such an orator. But to tell Russisch you can. I do not asking you to tell Deutsch. That will later be. The conquered must

to know the tongue from his conqueror. We Germans cannot to know the tongues from all the conquered. We must then to know all the tongues from the whole world. I do not understanding why you want not to speak."

There was a pause. At length, Krainev said:

"Very well. I will."

"To five o'clock will come a car und bring you in the radio station," the colonel told him, well pleased. He rose behind his desk, intimating that the audience was over.

Sergei Petrovich left the building with his brains in a whirl, entirely at a loss what to do. Here was confirmation of the thought that had occurred to him, with icy horror, the day before, as he drove through the town with the Germans: that the course of action he had chosen might lead him too far. None but himself could realize the true significance of his conduct; and he might very well be destroyed by the Soviet underground before he could achieve the aim he had set himself—to blow up the power station.

What to do? Flee? But how, and where to. in broad daylight?

And what if Pivovarov, for all his cowardice, had summoned up the courage to come out of hiding and tell his story to the Kommandant?

Perhaps even now, as Krainev walked down

the street, sharp eyes were watching his every movement?

Instinctively, he quickened his step.

If he refused to speak.... But that would amount to a confession of his true attitude towards the Germans. Yes, the one refuge was flight. Only—how, and where to?

This brought him back to where he had started from. There seemed to be no way out.

He had reached the settlement. Glancing towards the works, he noticed a slight quivering in the air over one of the stacks of the power station. Evidently, the Germans were trying to fire the boilers.

"So they've found people who are willing to work for them, from the very first day," Krainev reflected. "I wonder who?"

He tried to imagine the sound of his voice over the radio, appealing for collaboration with the Hitlerites. The thought was impossible. Again he turned to glance at the power station. A faint wisp of smoke appeared over the stack, and melted away in the clear air. Then another wisp appeared. This time it did not melt away, but hung steadily in place. Soon it was not a wisp, but a heavy cloud.

Krainev's thoughts turned to the charge of ammonite walled up in the cable channel.

How to get access to it, and blow it up? None but he, probably, knew of its existence. Walled up as it was, the Germans were not likely to discover it. But how to gain access? How to blow it up?

Mechanically, he walked on.

At home, the hours dragged by in painful indecision. Wandering from room to room, stumbling blindly against the furniture, Sergei Petrovich sought solution. Perhaps he should speak, as the Germans demanded, in order to gain their confidence? But he knew that, with the microphone before him, he could say only what he really felt. Clearly, he would be destroyed after his first few words, calling to struggle against fascism. And the power station would remain. No, he must cling to life, somehow, anyhow, until his task had been accomplished, until the power station lay in ruins.

The loudspeaker beside his bed suddenly broke into hoarse speech. The latest German communiqué was being broadcast in Russian from the town station.

At first Krainev listened attentively, weighing every word in his mind, attempting to distinguish truth from fiction. Then, with an impatient shrug, he turned back to his interrupted thoughts.

Yes, he was on the other side of the line.

Over there, beyond this line, that was called the front, his comrades were fighting and working, defending the Motherland. The eager wish to be with them swelled his heart almost to bursting; but he knew now that he would not go to them until he had carried out his task.

His own name struck his ear, coming wheezily from the loudspeaker. Another name followed—that of Smakovsky.

"I'll be damned if you get a single word from me," Krainev muttered, as though in reply.

An idea occurred. He frowned and shook his head. But it persisted. He could think of nothing better.

Half an hour before the time appointed, Sergei Petrovich set on the table a bottle of cognac, and two of port. They had been standing about in the sideboard since some time before the war. Looking down at them, he twisted his lips in a wry smile.

He drank a glass of cognac, and followed it with port. Then he repeated the dose, and repeated it again.

To his horror, he felt that the drink was not affecting him.

Gradually, however, the cognac did its work.

A little before six, a German car stopped in front of the house, and the driver went in. He

knocked for a long time at Krainev's door, but there was no response. Finally, he turned the knob. The door opened. Peering warily around him, he entered the apartment.

Krainev was fast asleep on the couch. The German tried to wake him, but he only muttered something unintelligible and slept on.

Bending over the couch, the German soon realized that Krainev was dead drunk. He looked at the clock, and cursed. Then, with a wistful glance at the empty bottles, he turned on his heel and left.

CHAPTER TWENTY

By eight o'clock, Serdyuk had lost all patience. Tired with his endless pacing up and down the room, he threw himself onto his bed. The Prasolovs should have been back long since.

Now and again, some sound in the night made him sit up, listening tensely, imagining that the gate had creaked, or that guarded footsteps sounded on the porch. Thus had it been in the days of his border service, when he sat anxiously awaiting the return of the night patrols. Time should have injured him; but it never had. He thought it easier by far to freeze in the forest the whole night through than to wait in his warm

room at the border post for his comrades to return. And at the border, after all, it had been easier; for the comrades who went out into the forest by night had been men of experience, men who had passed through the mill. Whereas now. . . .

Someone tapped lightly at the window that opened on the yard. At last! Serdyuk sprang up and hurried to the door. It was Pyotr Prasolov.

"Well? Talk up!"

"Krainev didn't speak," said Pyotr, and stopped to catch his breath. "I didn't see him. But I heard a shot outside Smakovsky's house, and then there was automatic fire, and some motorcycles rushed past. Then everything quieted down. They might have caught Pavel. What do you think?"

Serdyuk made no comment. After a vain attempt to draw him into discussion of what could be detaining Pavel, Pyotr settled down on a chair in the corner, facing the window, and sat motionless—waiting. Short, sturdily built, his head well set on a short, thick neck, he had the appearance of perfect calm. Not a muscle in his broad face moved, even when footsteps sounded in the street. Only his eyes would gleam more brightly for an instant.

"Where did he get his self-control?" Serdyuk wondered, recalling the brothers' onetime escapades. "In the Comsomol? But Pavel was with him in the Comsomol, yet he's still impetuous and unrestrained as ever."

At length Serdyuk glanced at the clock, dropped his long-dead cigarette into an ash-tray, and got up, saying:

"You go home. It's late. Only keep to back ways, and be careful."

Reluctantly, Pyotr moved towards the door. At the threshold, however, he stopped and said:

"Andrei Vasilyevich, my brother will come here before he goes home. He might come late at night. Let me stay."

Serdyuk had expected this. Nor did he himself want Pyotr to leave. It was not easy to be alone, on such a night. Still, after an instant's hesitation, he replied:

"No, it's no good. Go home. Who ever heard of two members of the underground spending the night in the same house, if it could possibly be helped? If they come to get one of us, they'll catch two instead! Go, and be quick."

"I won't go any further than the yard, anyway," Pyotr returned stubbornly. "I'll spend the night under the porch steps, if I have to, but I won't leave before my brother comes."

"Even if I order you to go?" asked Serdyuk, frowning.

"Even if you order me to go."

Unexpectedly, Serdyuk yielded.

"Oh, well, stay if you want to," he said, lying down again on his bed; and Pyotr was amazed by the dull indifference of his tone. "Only sit still, and don't go tramping round the house. My aunt doesn't like it. And besides, the floors have just been washed."

To himself, Serdyuk was thinking angrily:

"Raw cubs! One of them seems to have got into a fine mess—and with orders not to shoot unless the risk was negligible! And the other won't go home. Well, let him stay. When Pavel gets back, I'll give them both a talking-to.... Only—what if he doesn't get back?"

Out of the corner of his eye, he glanced across the room. Pyotr was sitting at the very edge of his chair, in the pose of one prepared to dash into action at an instant's notice.

"You might as well lie down," Serdyuk called, moving over to the wall. "We'll have a long wait. He won't come before morning, now."

Pyotr shook his head and remained where he was.

As the clock on the wall struck eleven, they heard a cautious tapping at the window. Prasolov

hurried out to the door. Serdyuk thrust his hand under the pillow, where his revolver lay.

There was a sound of whispering in the entry.

Pyotr reappeared, followed by Maria Grevtsova.

Nodding glumly in response to her greeting, Serdyuk demanded:

"Where are you planning to spend the night, Maria?"

"At home, of course," she replied. "Where else?"

"Then why do you come here so late?"

"I have important news."

"Just the same, you've no right to run such risks."

Grevtsova only shrugged indifferently.

Pyotr thought Serdyuk would be angry; but he only motioned Maria to a chair.

The girl looked slowly around the room: at the big, old-fashioned sideboard, filling all the space between two windows; the wide double bed, of polished walnut; the table, on thick, carved legs; the tiny lamp burning before the icons in the corner.

"It's a nice, comfortable room," she said. "Only you'll have to give it up."

Serdyuk glanced at her silently.

"Has Teplova ever been here?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Then you must move. She's refused to write the note."

"She may be right, at that," Serdyuk said thoughtfully. "I decided not to wait until she wrote, once this chance came up to finish him after he spoke over the radio. But he didn't speak. It's a queer business, and I don't entirely understand it. We'll have to keep our hands off him for a while."

"Keep our hands off?" Maria cried. "Why?"

But Serdyuk did not answer. He was not to be drawn out so easily. He was waiting for Pavel, and did not want to talk of anything else. Moreover, he was angry, thinking with growing irritation over the evening's developments. Three of them in one house. And if there should be a raid? Comparatively, he was safer than the others. He was provided with a passport, a document to the effect that he had recently served a prison term, and a certificate of rejection for military service in view of bad health. If no chance circumstance exposed him, all would be well. But the others? How explain their presence in his room?

A shot sounded in the street, setting the window panes rattling. Prasolov sprang to the door; but Serdyuk barred his way.

"Let me out, Andrei Vasilyevich," Prasolov whispered fiercely, trying to push past him. "Maybe it's Pavel they're after."

"And if it's Pavel, you want them to get Pyotr as well. Is that it?" returned Serdyuk, thrusting him back implacably. "What good can you do out there?"

Only after half an hour had passed did Serdyuk allow the young man to go out. Pyotr paused by the gate, looking warily up and down the street. At first he saw nothing. Gradually, however, his eyes adjusted themselves to the darkness; and soon he distinguished a dark mound on the pavement, out in the middle of the street. An instant later, he was kneeling beside it. It was a man, flat on his face. He wore a padded jacket just like Pavel's. Pyotr turned him over. A thick beard and moustache, and a gaping hole under one eye.

The measured steps of a German patrol sounded somewhere in the distance. Crouching low, Prasolov hurried back to the house. In the entry, Grevtsova and Serdyuk were waiting.

"Well?" both asked at once.

Pyotr told them what he had seen.

"And you were thinking of going home, Maria," said Serdyuk, as they returned to the room.

Again Maria shrugged contemptuously, resuming her old seat in the corner. Prasolov settled down beside her. Pyotr loved his brother, but knew his weaknesses only too well. Gifted with a lively imagination, Pavel was somewhat lacking in sense of proportion, and often needed a restraining hand.

Serdyuk lay down on the bed again, and closed his eyes. He hardly doubted, now, that Pavel was lost; and he was bitterly tormented by his own impotence.

"Is it self-control, or simply lack of human feeling?" Maria wondered. "How can he lie around that way, with a comrade's life in danger?"

She called softly:

"Andrei Vasilyevich!"

Serdyuk did not reply.

"Andrei Vasilyevich!" she called again.

He opened his eyes, and looked at her so that she lost all desire to question him.

For a long time there was no sound in the room. When footsteps sounded outside, all three would hold their breaths, anxiously listening; but the steps would always go by, dying away in the distance. No one turned in at the gate.

"What's new in town?" Serdyuk asked finally, evidently unable to bear the silence any long-

er. "What new orders from the Kommandantur?"

"Not many," replied Maria. "There's an order for all Communists to register; a municipal board has been set up; the Kommandant has appointed a burgomaster, and the burgomaster has appointed block and district agents. The Jews are ordered to organize a congregation. So far, that's all."

"It's quite enough," Serdyuk glumly returned.

Someone tapped, cautiously but persistently, at the window facing the yard. Pyotr immediately disappeared into the entry.

Pavel came in, wet and muddy, but radiant. Serdyuk sprang up to meet him, and, much to Maria's surprise, swept him into a joyful embrace.

"Well, how was it?"

"Beautiful! A regular fairy tale!" Pavel cried, breathless with enthusiasm. "The minute the car stopped, Smakovsky got out and made for the house on the run. Felt he'd be laid for, the dirty rat! Well, and the car didn't leave. Just my luck! He'd got to the door already, and the car was still there. So I just let go at him twice, and ripped the rest of the bullets at the car, straight at the car. And then I dived in at the gate and away through back yards. Only one thing—I don't know

how many I hit." Drawing himself suddenly up, he asked, in an entirely different tone: "What's the next assignment, Andrei Vasilyevich?"

"There won't be any more assignments," Serdyuk said drily.

"Lie low awhile?"

"No. There won't be any more assignments for you at all."

The three young people stared, wide-eyed. Serdyuk was clearly ill-pleased; but they dared not ask him what was wrong.

Unhurriedly, he drew a chair up to the table and sat down, motioning the others to follow his example. Only Pavel remained standing, afraid that his clothes might soil his chair and spot the tablecloth.

Serdyuk said:

"Repeat the orders you received."

Then Pavel understood.

"But how could I leave without firing a single shot?" he pleaded.

"Your orders were, to leave in case of obvious danger. Therefore, you were obliged to leave. Who gave you permission to shoot in full sight of the Germans? You're not free to dispose of your life as you choose. It belongs to our country, not to you. What made you so late? Was there a roundup?"

"Yes, they surrounded the whole block. Searched all the yards. But I got away."

"There you are. A pretty picture! You might have thrown away your life, to no purpose at all. Maria risked badly, too, coming here after curfew. Your brother refused to go home when he was told. And now there's four of us together. Just imagine a raid, right now. We'd all four be caught at one swoop. And since we haven't recruited any helpers yet, that would mean the end of our whole organization, with nothing at all accomplished. And another thing: what sort of fool ideas have you all got into your heads? Take Maria. 'If I'm killed,' she thinks, 'there will be one girl less, that's all.' Such heroism! Not begrudging her life, and all that. But she doesn't stop to think that one life is twenty per cent of our organization. What did you stay behind the lines for, I'd like to know: to die, or to fight?"

"To fight," Maria answered, very low.

"Very well, then. Let's fight. Only subtly—craftily—intelligently. Our job is, to kill Germans, but remain alive ourselves. To blaze, but not burn out. And if we do die, it must not be for trifles. So let's get this thing settled, for good and all: either we have discipline, iron discipline, or I drop all work with you. I'll find other helpers. You must take your choice."

Serdyuk left the table and sat down on the bed again, as though to show that he did not wish to hurry their decision.

Pavel had not yet cooled after the night's adventure. He had been so eager to share his joy with them! And here, instead of the expected praise, he was being reprimanded!

After a pause, Serdyuk continued:

"In the underground, discipline is more essential than anywhere else in life. On discipline depend not only your own life, but the lives of your comrades and the success of your undertakings. Yet, despising discipline, you three follow your own wills, and risk your lives in the silliest way. Do you think it was easy on me—on all of us—to sit here waiting for you, Pavel, especially after that business out there? Tell him about it, Pyotr."

And Serdyuk pointed in the direction of the street.

Pyotr told his brother about the man who had been shot that night, just outside the house. Pavel, listening, dropped his eyes.

"It's beginning to dawn on him," Serdyuk reflected. "Only—how long will it be before he forgets?"

"It won't happen again, Andrei Vasilyevich," Pavel said firmly, looking up at him. "I was wrong, of course."

And Pyotr, considering the matter settled, asked:

"What's the next assignment?"

"Nothing just yet," Serdyuk replied. "Later on, you'll have to find jobs—all of you. What sort of jobs, and where, we'll settle when the time comes; but it will be wherever the organization needs you: at the works, maybe, or in the police, or even in the Gestapo. That will be the most reliable camouflage. Maria's not a member of the Comsomol. We can send her safely into any German institution. You'll have to get used to the fact that there's nothing particularly romantic about the underground. It's hard work; humdrum, everyday work, requiring patience and self-control. And that means, clench your teeth till they crumble—but keep yourself in hand."

A silence fell. Maria Grevtsova sat very still, her chin on her hands. What Serdyuk had just said was altogether out of keeping with her conception of the fight behind the German lines. Patient waiting, humdrum work—her heart rebelled! As it was, she felt left out of things. Pyotr and Pavel had already received assignments, yet she was kept inactive.

At the other end of the table, Pyotr, sitting back in his chair as though resting quietly after

a day's work, watched his brother curiously out of the corner of an eye.

"Children, inexperienced youngsters," Serdyuk reflected, looking across the room at them with the tenderness of an elder brother. "They ought to be peacefully discussing Comsomol affairs, organizing youth teams at the works, perhaps. And instead...."

He got up and joined them at the table.

"You must understand, comrades of mine," he said, with an earnest warmth that took Maria by surprise. "You must understand. For me, what I'm doing now is the same work I've done before. At the border, I guarded our Motherland, our people, against the vermin that tried to sneak across the line. I destroyed those vermin. And now, too, I'll be destroying the vermin that have crossed our border, that are trying to defile our soil. With you, it's different. You never had any conception of this sort of work. Maria, say. She was planning to go to Moscow this fall, to study. She's very much interested in astronomy. Isn't that so?"

"Why, yes," murmured Grevtsova, wondering at his knowledge of her plans.

"And the work you're doing now is as far a cry from astronomy as heaven from earth. Or take Pyotr. He was going to be a Party functionary."

"You're wrong there," Pyotr put in. "It never entered my head."

"Well, it entered other heads. There was a decision to send you to a school for Comsomol activists, if you wanted to go. Pavel—he hadn't made any plans for the future yet. He liked his work, and did it well. All of you were living a peaceful life, living it and building it up. And now you must fight for that life. It's not an easy task, and it's not one in which you can afford to blunder. You won't be reproved for blunders at meetings now, or reprimanded by the management. You'll be hung. That's why we must have iron discipline."

They sat talking until morning. When day broke, Serdyuk went to the window and flung open the shutter. In the middle of the street, flat on his back, lay a man in a padded jacket. A pool of blood gleamed black on the pavement beside him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Smakovsky's career began auspiciously: initiated by his speech over the radio, and furthered not a little by the unsuccessful attempt on his life. He became at once a person of consequence, and the Germans appointed him man-

ager of the works. True, the position was a temporary one, pending the arrival of the new "proprietor," Baron von Wechter: but Smakovsky set zealously to work.

All electricians who had failed to evacuate were rounded up and brought to the power station, where they were kept under close guard. Most of the work, however, was done by a German military labour unit. For the beginning, only one of the four boilers was fired—just enough to provide light for the town and settlement.

After the power station, the Germans undertook the restoration of the machine shop, which they planned to use for the repair of tanks and trucks.

The day after his appointment, Smakovsky moved into a roomy, well-furnished apartment in a house that stood by the very gates of the works.

This was the most secure of residences, inasmuch as there was always a patrol on duty at the gates, and, living here, he had no need to show himself in the streets of the settlement.

The attempt on his life had seriously alarmed the new manager, and he was always careful to leave the works before dark. Even at home, however, he was constantly haunted by a sense of impending danger, particularly strong in the dark

hours of night. He locked up half the rooms in the apartment, barricaded the kitchen door—and continued to start nervously at every sound.

Irina, who had linked her fate with his, was gradually infected with a similar terror. Fear became this couple's customary state of being. Irina, moreover, learning that Krainev had remained in town, trembled at the thought of a possible encounter with him. She had never understood her husband; and she was altogether at a loss to comprehend his sudden shift to the German camp. How would he behave, she wondered, on meeting her or Smakovsky? Though, after all, what could he do? Were they not birds of a feather, now?

Vladislav Smakovsky—that was a different matter. She had always understood him perfectly.

Vladislav had spent his early childhood in ease and luxury, his father, Georgi Apollonovich Stokovsky, being a wealthy shareholder and member of the board of the Bryansk Locomotive Co. The year 1917, however, had turned everything upside down. The workers had carted papa Stokovsky out of the plant in a wheelbarrow, and tumbled him into a ditch full of dirty water. Anxious to avoid repetition of this rather chilly bath, Georgi Apollonovich had gathered up his family and his household goods and migrated to the "capital" of

the Don territory, where, he felt, there could be no revolution.

Then the Don, too, had become Soviet. On the heels of the retreating White army, the Stokovskys had removed to the Crimea; but their attempt to escape abroad had failed, the last ship leaving before they reached the coast. Thus, no choice had remained but to settle down under the Soviets. A family council, at this juncture, had thought it best that papa Stokovsky "accept" the Revolution and go to work excellent tactics, as it had transpired, Stokovsky being one of the first of professional men to come over to the Soviet side.

After a life in which his only cares and obligations had consisted of attendance at infrequent board meetings and regular receipt of dividends, Georgi Apollonovich found work a very difficult thing to get accustomed to. In his free hours, at home, he grumbled and complained continually.

Vladislav was kept out of school, studying at home under his father's guidance; for the elder brother, Dmitri, on entering school, had rapidly begun to absorb "plebeian" manners and views, and the parents, horror-stricken, had resolved to preserve their younger son, at least, from such dread influences. Only at the age of eighteen did

he find himself in the classroom, entering school in the last grade.

Older and better provided for than most of his schoolmates, Vladislav held himself aloof, coldly disdainful of these boys and girls whose fathers were so much less distinguished than his. Stokovsky was at this time chief engineer of a big iron and steel works in Siberia.

Vladislav's arrogant manner, inherited from his father, could gain him no friends. His only companion was the little girl, Irina.

Irina's mother, widowed in early life, had come to live with the Stokovskys as a sort of housekeeper, or poor relative—she did not much care what she might be called, so long as her daughter received what she termed "a genteel bringing up." Evil tongues had it that the housekeeper's duties were considerably enlarged during Madame Stokovsky's frequent absences at health resorts. But what will not evil tongues find to say!

Vladislav was strongly attracted by Irina's pretty face, by her imperious air.

The atmosphere in the Stokovsky household was one of tearful reminiscence of the past and vague hopes for the future. The present was ignored.

At nineteen, Vladislav graduated from school and left for Tomsk, to study at the Institute of

Technology there. But he did not succeed in completing his studies.

Georgi Apollonovich, commissioned to Germany to purchase equipment for the Soviet iron and steel industry, remained abroad, breaking off all communication with his family. Six months later, Vladislav dropped out of the Institute and disappeared from Tomsk.

For some time he wandered about the country, trying various towns and various professions. And always it seemed to him that he was kept down to lesser positions than he deserved. He felt the urge to be in command, to order people about.

Eventually, deciding to renew his studies, he matriculated in an iron and steel institute in the Donbas. It was here that he re-encountered Irina. She was working as secretary in the office of the institute.

Vladislav had somewhat altered his family name and patronymic. Irina made no allusion to the change. They became intimate friends.

The time came for the presentation and public maintenance of diploma theses. Smakovsky was scheduled to present his thesis on the same day as one of the evening students—Sergei Petrovich Krainev. Irina came to hear them. She was acquainted with Krainev, and rather liked him. Vladislav

was embittered. guarded, often sombre; Krainev. cheerful, unassuming, friendly--far easier to get along with.

Smakovsky made a brilliant showing. Equipped with an excellent knowledge of German and English, he had written a voluminous, though purely compilatory thesis. His opponents were few, and he had no difficulty in refuting their remarks, plentifully seasoning his well-selected material with references to West-European authorities. His fine show of erudition impressed not only the audience, but the diploma board.

Then Krainev came forward, composed, laconic, to maintain his thesis—an original design for the ports of the open-hearth furnace. He cited no world-famed authorities. His idea was new, and entirely his own, matured in the course of several years of work at the furnaces.

The problem was a much-debated one, and Krainev's new solution encountered many opponents. In his replies to their remarks, he did not cite a single foreign source. Nothing could have emphasized more sharply the difference between Krainev and Smakovsky.

Presented with profound and sincere conviction, Krainev's precise calculations of thermal conditions, backed by references to personal experience and to the joint experience of his

fellow steelmen, convinced the diploma board of the utility of his proposal.

When he finished, it became clear to all that, unlike Smakovsky—a mere translator in the field of engineering—Krainev was an engineer destined to create.

Irina, too, recognized this difference. The future, she saw, was Krainev's. And she felt a new attraction towards this quiet, confident young man.

Krainev was invited to stay on at the institute for postgraduate study; but he refused, and took an engineering job in an iron and steel works. He loved the shop and the furnaces, the fascinating process of steelmaking.

Smakovsky was not interested in postgraduate study. Teaching was not the sort of work to flatter his vanity. He, too, took a position in a Donbas works, in pursuit of a "metallurgical" career.

This was the period when Soviet metallurgy had just begun its splendid upswing; when the whole country applauded the feats of blast-furnace men, steelmen, rolling mill men who were upsetting the old production norms and setting new high standards.

Yet Smakovsky's plans for a swift career did not materialize. He was not lacking in knowl-

edge; but he had never learned to work, and pride kept him from learning. He could not get along with his fellow engineers, could not merge with the works collective.

Growing lonely, he recalled Irina, and made an attempt to search her out. But she had married, it appeared, and left the institute together with her husband.

Then, shortly before the war, Krainev was transferred to the same works in which Smakovsky was employed. Smakovsky, at that time shift engineer in the open-hearth shop, promptly requested a transfer to the engineering department on plea of ill health.

He and Irina met as old friends. They had much in common, and enjoyed each other's company.

Sergei Petrovich was very occupied, anxious to bring the shop to rights as quickly as possible, to ensure plan fulfilment. When the war began, he was completely absorbed by his work. Smakovsky, on the other hand, was entirely free after working hours. Not even the necessity for mastering output of the new armour steel could keep him or Valsky at their desks in the engineering department a moment longer than usual. Dubenko cursed them for whistle worshippers, day labourers, idle loafers; but they continued im-

perturbably to leave the works as soon as their official hours were over. Valsky would go home, Smakovsky—to the Krainevs'.

Irina was always glad to see him, for she had no other friends. She did not get along with Elena Makarova, who was always busy with her boy and her studies, and, when the war began, with her volunteer work in the army hospital. Besides, Elena was a general favourite, and that Irina could not forgive. No one must excel her in any way.

Smakovsky was an agreeable companion, if only for the fact that he approved everything Irina said or did. This, in her eyes, was a major virtue.

Marriage, by this time, had proved a great disappointment to Irina. Conceiving of love as one long honeymoon, she could not reconcile herself to what she called "the prose of life."

And now she felt that with Smakovsky she could be happier. She believed in him implicitly, and he found no difficulty in persuading her that the Soviet Union would be defeated in the war—a conclusion, moreover, which seemed to her completely justified by events at the front.

And then Smakovsky set the alternative: evacuation—which, he said, was sure in the final account to end in capture by the Germans; or a

new life, here, with him. She chose the latter. She had no fear of the Germans. When they came, she was confident, Vladislav would achieve his career. He had every necessary quality.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Germans were infuriated by the attempt on Smakovsky, during which one of the soldiers accompanying him was wounded. Evidently, there was an underground organization in the town, swift to strike and fearless of reprisals. Searches and arrests began throughout the town.

For some days, Krainev was forgotten. He stayed at home, living on canned goods and vanilla rusks, which Irina had stored up in incredible quantities, and eating his heart out over his enforced inactivity and the uncertainty of his position.

The ammonite walled up in the cable channel haunted his dreams and his waking thoughts. There were moments when he felt he had been wrong not to speak over the radio. Had he spoken, his prime task, the destruction of the power station, would have become easier of achievement. His failure to speak must, of course, have set the Germans against him, thus imperilling all his

plans. Again, there was the danger of exposure by Pivovarov. Bitterly, Krainev realized his utter helplessness.

Not until four days after the radio incident was Krainev summoned to the Kommandantur. Walking down the street beside the orderly who had been sent for him, he wondered: was the orderly there to protect him, or to guard him?

In these four days, his decision to seize upon every possible means for the destruction of the power station had strengthened into firm and unshakable resolution. The restoration of electric lighting in the town, and the Germans' boasting promises, over the radio, to restore the works in quick time, had still further stimulated his desire for action.

Colonel Pfaul received him coldly. Twisting his thick lips into a contemptuous grimace, he enquired:

"Are you today not drunken?"

The Kommandant was not alone. Beside him at the desk sat another German, with close-cropped hair, whom Krainev had not seen before. There was something reminiscent of the predatory pike about this German's face, with its wide, thin-lipped slit of a mouth, and long, thin nose.

Receiving no reply to his first question, the colonel asked:

"Do you knowing what iss happen after the radio broadcast?"

Krainev nodded. The colonel went on:

"We are decite to make quick an end from this things. We shoot today on the market place ten arrestanten. After, for every German soldat will we shoot twenty Russians. You are shoot fery gut, und I am decite to make you pleasure. You will be for the cinema photographed. A fery interesting cinema. You will come?"

Sergei Petrovich was stiff with horror. He had come here firmly determined to agree to any proposal that might help him achieve his aim. But this—this went far beyond his worst expectations.

Pfaut was watching searchingly; but not a muscle quivered in Krainev's face.

"Why, yes, of course I'll come," he replied, hoping thus to gain time for thought.

The colonel glanced at his slit-mouthed neighbour, in evident satisfaction. Pulling a watch from his pocket—a massive gold watch, with a Russian monogram on the case—he said:

"Now iss two o'clock. To four o'clock must you be here, but not late und not trunken."

Pfaut was not so simple as he seemed, by far. Evidently, his suspicions had been aroused, and he was now verifying them, putting Krainev to the final test for loyalty.

Leaving the Kommandantur, Sergei Petrovich moved slowly across the square and down one of the streets opening on it, determined not to return at the appointed hour. After some thought, however, he changed his mind. Yes, he would return to the Kommandantur. He would go with them to the market place. He would shoot—shoot at these fascist swine. Surely, before he was killed, he could manage to fire all the shots in his revolver. The power station would remain undestroyed; but he would have done his utmost. "What else could I expect?" he reflected sadly. "Senseless and useless extinction—that's what comes of trying to fight the Germans on your own."

Unquestionably, there must be an underground organization in the town. He should have gotten in touch with it, from the very first. But how? How could he have found its members?

In any case, it was too late now.

Sergei Petrovich glanced at his watch. It was half past two. At four, he would report to the Kommandantur. At five, he would be dead.

He drew a deep breath of the fresh autumn air. It smelled of dampness and decaying maple leaves.

A strange composure lulled his thoughts. Everything had been settled—had settled itself. There

was nothing more to puzzle over. No more need for haste. How stupidly life was to be cut short! Only so recently, there had been so much ahead. And the term of life to which he had once looked forward seemed suddenly infinite, unlimited, as compared with the few short hours that now remained.

He could picture clearly the scene at the market place.

Those who were to be shot, and those who were to shoot them. The stony ranks of the Hitlerites. The crowd of Soviet citizens, driven to the market place to witness the execution. A handful of officials, and among them potbellied Pfaul and the lean, pike-faced German. At that handful he would discharge his revolver—no, his automatic rifle. He must be sure to ask for an automatic. A fine show for their cameramen, he'd give them!

Of course, they would not take him alive. But above all, he must get some bullets into them before he was killed.

"No fear," he said aloud. "They'll be too dumbfounded to move, at first."

Of what would follow, he did not want to think. His mind turned to other things.

Vadim! Krainev's heart contracted in pain and tender love. Never to see his son again! The

Makarovs, of course, would bring him up. The years would pass, and little Vadim would grow to manhood: Vadim Sergeevich.

At any rate, no one could ever say to him that his father had been a traitor.

Again Sergei Petrovich looked at his watch. An hour and fifteen minutes still remained. Absently, he glanced up at a corner house to see what street he had turned into. Pervomaiskaya. He stopped short. This was the street where Valya lived.

"She would have understood. Why didn't I seek her out earlier?" he asked himself reproachfully. "It may not have been just her mother's illness that kept her here, but the resolve to fight the Germans in the underground. If I could see her now, and tell her about that ammonite charge at the power station! She'd know whom to tell, so the task I failed in would be carried out. Carried out by people working together, not single-handed, the way I tried to do."

Hastening his step, he soon reached Valya's house. All the windows were shuttered. No one answered his knock. He went around to the back; but the back door was boarded up. Obviously, Valya was no longer living here.

For some minutes he stood outside the door, at a loss what to do next. Then, turning sharply,

he went out to the street again and strode rapidly back towards the Kommandantur.

Coming into the square, he passed by a man sitting on a porch. He did not notice that the man got up and followed him, just a few paces behind.

Quite a number of Germans had gathered outside the Kommandantur. Pfaul stood at the front of the group, with the slit-mouthed man beside him. Touring cars were strung along the curb. A truck came rumbling down the driveway from the back. Automatic riflemen clung to its sides. Up in the body stood the condemned: an old man with long grey beard and moustache; a young woman in a woollen blouse, with a baby in her arms; two workers in grease-stained overalls, their faces stern and sombre. The rest were not to be seen. Evidently, too weak to stand, they were lying on the floor.

The truck stopped directly in front of the building. Noticing Krainev, Pfaul beckoned imperatively. Krainev walked faster. So did the man behind him. Suddenly, the man called Krainev by name. Sergei Petrovich stopped and stared at him, trying to remember where he had seen this tall, lanky figure—this elderly face, with the stubborn, bulging forehead and the firm lips, determinedly compressed.

Rapidly approaching, the stranger took out a cigarette, and began to slap his pockets, as though in search of matches. Then, when they were face to face, he whipped out a revolver and fired at Krainev point-blank.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The time came when they found themselves once more together: young Sasha, hollow-checked, but buoyed up by his old lively spirit; Opanasenko, gloomier than ever; Lutsenko, a gaunt skeleton, and Dyatlov, dull and depressed—all returned to the shop, though not all in the same manner. Valsky—now shop manager again, though the Germans called him simply “meister,” or foreman, and the Russians, more simply still, “lick-spittle”—had sent politzais to fetch Opanasenko, and, encountering Lutsenko in the street, had promptly collared him and dragged him to the works. Dyatlov had been caught in a roundup at the market place. Only Sasha had come voluntarily, by registering at the employment bureau. Sasha was thus in a position of privilege. As a “volunteer,” he lived at home from the first, coming in only to work, while the others were kept in the shop day and night, under guard.

for a whole week, before the Germans would trust them out of sight.

The shop was changed beyond all recognition. The roof had been torn off by the explosions, and the roof girders and crane track girders, against the cheerless grey of the autumn sky, seemed to hover at an incredible height. Where the furnaces had stood loomed heaps of crumbled brick and twisted iron.

From morning to night, they potted about in the rubbish that was left of No. 1 furnace. For this work, each received a bowl of soup and three hundred grams of something called bread, baked of unknown ingredients, heavy as clay and coarse as oilcake.

That day, the visit of the authorities brought even more unpleasantness than usual.

Sonderführer Geiss, a tall, narrow-shouldered German, kicked over the portable iron stove at which the workers had been trying to warm up. The stove tumbled onto Sasha's legs, setting his overalls on fire, and it was only with difficulty that the flame was beaten down. Geiss cursed them all for "Bolsheviks." He shouted interminably, both at the workers and at "meister" Valsky; and when he paused for breath, the "meister" carried on. Out of the flood of words, the workers comprehended little except that sitting down

was not allowed; smoking was not allowed; and those who did their work badly would get no bread.

As soon as Valsky and the German were gone, all four, as though by tacit consent, set to work rolling cigarettes. There was plenty to smoke, for Sasha brought in a whole potful of dry horse dung every morning. "Horselegs," the manure cigarettes were called.

"Damn idiots we were," Opanasenko muttered harshly, drawing the thick, acrid smoke deep into his lungs.

"Idiot yourself," Dyatlov returned, rolling a second horseleg. "I was all ready to go, and then you had to butt in, with your 'whys' and 'where tos.' And here's 'where to' for you!"

The others laughed cheerlessly.

"What are you grumbling about, anyway, Ippolit Yevstigneyevich? You haven't lost anything," said Lutsenko, with a caustic grin. "Your house is still there, and all your junk inside it. You stayed to take care of your belongings. Well, go ahead and take care of 'em!"

"What do you mean—I haven't lost anything?" cried Opanasenko. "My quality, that's what I've lost. My good name. Like an ingot that's got left behind the rest of the tap. Who can tell what it is—good steel, or spoilage? When our

folks come back. they'll want to know: 'Comrade head foreman, why did you stay behind?' No, they won't call me comrade. 'What sort of comrade are you?' they'll say. 'We disabled the shop, and you repaired it. We fought the Germans at the front and in the shops and plants. And you helped the Germans.'"

He flung away the butt of his cigarette, as though it were to blame.

"Yes," Dyatlov said drearily. "That's about how it looks. Take Dmitryuk. One foot in the grave, and just the same he left. Even Vasya Buroi left, and we all know the kind he is. Rowing over everything on earth! If the quotas were revised, he'd yell they were too big. When pay day came, he'd yell he got too little—fifteen hundred rubles wasn't enough to suit him. At dinner hour, he'd yell that the soup was thin, or the bread not baked right. Getting on the train, even, he yelled, because the best place wasn't reserved for him. And yet, he left—and we stayed on."

"He'll row over everything out there too," put in Sasha gloomily. Gingerly he felt the burns on his legs.

"Of course he will," Lutsenko replied. "Only he's out there. Here, now—just try it! Take Steblev, yesterday—he just pointed to his belt

when Geiss went by, as if to say the eats were bad, and his belly was shrinking. And today---no Steblev! I hear he's in a camp now, behind barbed wire, under the open sky."

The wind whistled in the girders overhead, flapping the few scattered sheets that remained of the roof. A drizzling rain began to fall. Dyatlov shivered.

"If we could light a fire," he said.

"Try it," Lutsenko told him. "They'll warm you up fast enough. Didn't you hear lickspittle yelling? Work, and you'll be warm, he said. Only loafers freeze."

"Anyway, there was no chance for everyone to leave," Opanasenko mumbled, still absorbed in his own problem.

"No, not for everyone," Dyatlov returned. "But the ones that wanted to leave, did. And we stayed here, in the devil's own mess. All on account of you, you blasted fool!" He pointed accusingly at Opanasenko. "And now we have to work for the Germans!"

"You're a queer fellow, Ivan," said Lutsenko. "Real queer. Lived to old age, and none the wiser for it! You work and suffer and I work and rejoice. Do you really think it's the Germans we're working for?"

"Who else?"

"Our own people! By the time we get this rubbish cleared away, they'll be marching back. Maybe sooner, even. And then we'll start rebuilding. Do you think the Germans can rebuild all this? Nothing doing! Specially, with us around. They won't ride far by harnessing us, I can tell you."

"Not far, you think?" asked Opanasenko, brightening.

"Of course not! They'll get off right where they started."

"It's not only the harness that's hell. There's the bridle too. And they've got that tight and strong. All we can do is wait till our own folks come back and pull it off. And when they do, they'll want to know: 'Why did you stay behind?'"

"What matters isn't who stayed behind, but how they acted," Sasha remarked philosophically.

"Yes, and you've acted just right!" grunted Opanasenko. "The rest of us couldn't help ourselves. They dragged us here. But you went running to their bureau, volunteering. A fine member of the Comsomol!"

Sasha sniffed offensively, but held his tongue.

The rain grew steadily heavier. Water trickled down Opanasenko's cap and under his collar. He shivered.

"Afraid of the Urals I was, on account of the frosts," he muttered, in a sort of self-flagellation. "At the furnaces it's warm enough, even in the Urals. Out there, they're working, making steel. Ah, when I remember--testing the steel. Dipping the spoon, and pouring out the metal. Maybe you'll laugh at me, but--well, it makes my mouth water, like the smell of good food. They're working, out there, and we..." He turned to indicate the heaped-up rubbish. "If we could only get the least little news from the front. If we could know how things are going. There's lots of talk in town, but how can you tell what's lies and what's the truth?"

Sasha looked up at him suddenly, with strangely searching eyes. Catching his glance, Opanasenko frowned.

"Keep your mouth shut, youngster," he said sharply. "Not a word about our talk, or you'll be sorry. Sec?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Resolving to remain in town, Valya Teplova had prepared her mind for capture, for concentration camp, for death. Only for one thing had she been unprepared: the torment of loneliness and inaction.

Her mother died. They buried her, Valya and Darya Vasilyevna, in the back yard, in a coffin they had made themselves, not very expertly, out of the rotting boards of the garden fence. Darya Vasilyevna stayed for a few days, trying, through her own tears to comfort Valya. All of Darya Vasilyevna's long life had been devoted to others: her husband, her children, then Valya's ailing mother. Loving Valya as a daughter, she now poured out on her all the warmth of her motherly heart.

At times, it seemed to Valya that she could have borne her grief more easily alone. Darya Vasilyevna reminded her too much of her mother: the same kind eyes, the same caressing hands, even the same manner of speaking; for, in their years of friendship, the two old women had unconsciously absorbed from one another many peculiarities of phrase and intonation.

Soon, however, Darya Vasilyevna went back to live in the Teplovas' house, which had been standing empty all these days. There was a large supply of coal there, still undiscovered by the Germans. Trudging out to the nearby villages with a sack of coal, the old woman would bring home, in exchange, now a pail of potatoes, now a supply of dried maize. She went always alone, refusing to take Valya with her lest the girl be seized by the Germans.

Now Valya saw Darya Vasilyevna only rarely, in the intervals between these foraging excursions. For the first time in her life, she was alone, entirely alone. Hunger sapped her strength. Her knees trembled, and her head swam. Yet how happy would she have been, had hunger been her only trial! Far worse was the fact that Maria did not come. This deprived her of all contact with the underground; for Valya had received strict orders, during their first meeting, not to show herself at Serdyuk's.

The shooting on the square, outside the Kommandantur, was a heavy blow. Valya did not believe that Krainev was a traitor. He had become the victim, she felt, of some fearful misunderstanding. But there came moments when she began to doubt; when she would shrink in horror, haunted by the face of that unknown comrade who had shot Krainev and then flung a hand grenade at the Germans. They had hung him, right there on the square. She alone, Valya felt, had been the cause of this comrade's death. Had she written to Krainev that day, everything would have turned out differently.

Gradually, she arrived at the conclusion that she must try to get across the front, as the only possible way out of her situation.

One evening, coming from the well with a

pail of water, Valya felt a light touch on her shoulder. She turned, and stopped short in amazement. It was Sasha—thin and ragged, but seeming cheerful enough nonetheless.

"Good evening, Valya," he said, seizing her pail.

Silently, they went up the path and into the house.

Sasha sat down and looked around the bare, ugly room. He seemed quite satisfied with what he saw.

"Working anywhere, Valya?" he asked.

"Of course not! What a question!"

Looking earnestly into her worn face, with the dark circles under the eyes, he asked again:

"Then what do you eat?"

"Just about nothing."

Sasha produced a hunk of bread, wrapped in a newspaper.

"Here, eat this," he said, laying it down on the table.

Valya had had no food for two days, Darya Vasilyevna having been gone longer than usual. Taking the bread, Valya broke it in two and set one piece in front of Sasha.

"And you, Sasha?" she asked. "Are you working?"

He nodded. Valya put down her bread.

"Caught in a roundup?"

"No. I went to the employment bureau myself. If you don't go to work, you'll die of hunger, even sooner than you will working. And this is no time for dying. There are things a person can do. Isn't that so. Valya?"

He glanced at her significantly.

"It is, Sasha. Only—how?"

"Valya, I need your advice. I don't know how to go about things."

"I don't know either," she answered simply.

"I don't know. You don't know. He doesn't know," Sasha chanted softly. "In the singular. it's pretty bad. Let's try the plural. We don't know. You don't know. They—know! That sounds better! They do know, Valya, isn't that so?"

Valya understood. He did not believe that it was only her mother's illness that had kept her in town. He was confident that she, the leader of his Comsomol unit, must be connected with the underground. Always so unruly, so impatient of authority, the boy was now eager for advice and guidance.

It was a bitter pill; but she could not tell him what had happened. She did not have the right. And even had she been free to tell him, she would most probably not have done so.

She pretended that she did not grasp his meaning.

After a silence, he asked crisply:

"Do you get the communiqués?"

"Our communiqués? Sasha! Do you?"

He began to recite the latest news from the front, keeping as closely as he could to the terse style of the radio broadcasts. As he spoke, he saw her face change, her eyes light up.

And when, in conclusion, he pronounced impressively: "Soviet Information Bureau"—she sprang up and, throwing her arms around him, kissed him joyfully. Overcome with embarrassment, he sat stiffly on his chair, hiding his hands behind him for fear of soiling her blouse.

"How do you get it?"

"From a fellow I know."

"And he?"

"From a fellow he knows."

Valya bit her lip.

"Do you trust me, Sasha?" she asked.

Did he trust her? Of course he trusted her. And loved her, too, as an elder sister who had done much to make a man of him; as an elder comrade, at once solicitous and demanding. How often Valya had had to reprove him for his boyish pranks! At one time, she had actually given him up, and proposed his expulsion from the

Comsomol; but afterwards, seeing how earnestly he tried to mend his ways, she had stood up for him when the question was discussed at the Town Committee, and, in view of her championship, his expulsion had not been confirmed.

"I trust you, Valya—trust you more than I do myself. But I've given my Comsomol word of honour, so you see how it is. You're not insulted, are you?"

"No, I'm not insulted," she said, smiling. "I see how it is."

"Well, then, here's the point, Valya. The fellows have a radio. Not a very good one: a crystal set, home made. Only we don't know what to do about leaflets. That's where we need your advice. There's no sense pasting them up. We've tried it. The politsais inspect the streets every morning, and scrape the leaflets off. And anyone they find reading 'em gets pulled in. And the Germans are even worse than the politsais. They just shoot on the spot. I was thinking maybe we ought to put 'em in people's mailboxes."

"Who ever looks in their mailboxes now? What for?"

Sasha hung his head shamefacedly.

After some reflection, Valya said:

"Look, Sasha—it's only three days to November seventh. There must be leaflets that day. And

not just dropped around in back yards, either. That may be all right for later on, but not for our holiday. We have to get them out on a mass scale, demonstratively--something people will remember. Not only our own people, but the Germans, too. Think, Sasha, boy! Try to think of something!"

Think as he might, however, Sasha could find no solution. Valya, sunk in thought, crinkled her forehead and bit her lips. Suddenly, she smiled.

"Got it?" he cried eagerly.

"No, Sasha, not yet," she answered, shaking her head. "Come around again tomorrow, at about this time. Perhaps I'll think of something by then."

Serdyuk opened the door to Valya's knock. For some time, he stood stiffly at the threshold, as though to block the way. Then, jerkily, he moved aside and let her in. Clearly, he had no desire to see her.

"I have news, Andrei Vasilyevich," Valya said, dropping into a chair, though he had not invited her to be seated. "There's a group of young people who have a radio. One of the boys came to me for advice. They don't know what to do about leaflets. I asked for a day to think it over,

and—well, here I am. I must tell him something this evening.”

Serdyuk put a few questions about Sasha, and then, in the same casual tone, enquired whether she had told the boy of her connection with the underground.

“How can you ask, Andrei Vasilyevich?” she cried indignantly. “What do you take me for?”

“What can I take you for, once you’ve refused to help us do away with a traitor?” Serdyuk returned, thinking it best to come openly to the point.

“I know Sergei Petrovich,” Valya said. “I don’t believe he’s a traitor.”

“You thought highly of Krainev, didn’t you?” asked Serdyuk.

“Very. Both as my superior, and ... well, personally.”

Softened by her straightforward reply, Serdyuk went on, more gently:

“Perhaps that’s why you...”

“Perhaps,” Valya broke in, flushing painfully. “I’ve thought and thought about it, asked myself over and over if it wasn’t simply that. But I still think as I did. He wasn’t intending to stay, I know. He sent his little boy East with our people. And he urged me to go, too. Sincerely. And then—

he stayed. There's something behind it that I can't make out. He was supposed to speak over the radio, but he didn't. You acted hastily, it seems to me."

Serdyuk was taken aback by the frank condemnation in her eyes.

"It wasn't our work," he said. "It was an act of individual terrorism. And, precisely for that reason, it was a failure. A life for a life is too dear a price to pay. None of the Germans got more than a few scratches. However, there's no good discussing it now. Time will show which of us was right."

He was silent for a while. Then he asked:

"Do you want to help us?"

"Andrei Vasilyevich! Aren't you ashamed, to doubt me so? Since the day Comrade Kravchenko sent me to you, I belong entirely to the underground. But let's get back to those leaflets. Here's my plan."

And she explained to Serdyuk the idea which had struck her the day before.

"Are you sure it will work out technically?" he asked.

"Positive, Andrei Vasilyevich."

"Go to it, then. Only carefully! If it fails, come around again, and we'll try and think up something else."

When she had left, Serdyuk sat for a long time motionless, sunk in thought. He could not but admit to himself that he, too, lacked clarity in the matter of Krainev. A mysterious business!

On November seventh, the Germans redoubled their watchfulness. Patrols paced the streets, and fighter planes darted overhead all day.

Towards noon, the officer on duty burst into Pfaul's office, without knocking, and shouted:

"Leaflets!"

Pfaul shrugged his shoulders, frowning. This was nothing new. Leaflets appeared in every occupied Soviet town, and he had come to regard them as an inevitable evil.

"Where?" he asked composedly, glancing ironically up at the officer's frightened face.

"In the air! Dropping right out of the sky!"

Pfaul's eyebrows lifted.

"Tell me no children's tales," he exclaimed angrily. But he got up and went out of doors to see for himself.

What the officer had told him was true.

Some minutes past, in broad daylight, leaflets had appeared over the town. At first, no one had noticed them. Fluttering across the bright blue of the cloudless sky, they had resembled a flock of soaring pigeons. Soon, however, many of them

went to the employment bureau as a volunteer. Well, my dears, happy holiday!"

And, turning to his wife, he kissed her three times, in the old Russian way—a sudden tenderness that brought the tears to her eyes.

For three days, special watchers scanned the skies until their eyes smarted with weariness. Nothing happened. On the fourth day, leaflets floated down once more. Again the wind was from the East. The watchers were severely reprimanded. The leaflets appeared yet again, and still the watchers could not say where from.

Pfaul was beside himself. Unable to offer any explanation, he could only bleat helplessly into the telephone in response to the regional Kommandant's intricate profanity.

At length, one of the watchers appeared at the Kommandantur and reported that the leaflets came from the end smokestack of the open-hearth shop. Striding up to the soldier, Pfaul sniffed suspiciously. But the man was entirely sober.

The Kommandant ordered an ambush set inside the stack. For several days, the soldiers waited, shivering and cursing in the piercing draft. Then the leaflets appeared again. This time they were seen to issue from the stack of No. 3 furnace. The Kommandant ordered posts set up in all

the open-hearth stacks. The very next morning the leaflets came again, fluttering up past the frightened soldiers, like a swarm of bats, out of the darkness of the flue.

Pfaul sent for Smakovsky and Valsky, and went with them to the open-hearth shop. Guessing, at last, where the secret lay, Valsky thrust a sheet of paper into the opening of the flue. A few seconds later, his sheet of paper flew out at the top of the stack. The riddle was solved. Posts were set up outside the stacks as well, beside the shutters. Then the leaflets appeared from the stack of the sintering plant.

Frantic with rage, Pfaul ordered posts established in every stack throughout the works. All the flues were hastily bricked up.

Sasha was upset.

"We've reached the end of our tether," he told Valya glumly. "The Fritzes are airing themselves in all the stacks."

"That was only to be expected," Valya replied. "Now we'll have to start pasting. But the main thing is done: the leaflets are expected, and read. And you know, Sasha, they've got to appear daily. We'll paste them on the inner side of fences, and along the stairways of the big apartment houses."

"It's a shame to lose our air mail system, though," said Sasha regretfully. "Especially the stack in the sintering plant. It's a fine stack, the tallest at the works. It's hard to get to, of course, but the draft is so good it pulls your hat off, and you feel as if you'd go flying up yourself in another minute. How on earth those Fritzes stand it. I don't know." He laughed. "After three minutes of it, your teeth begin to chatter like Valsky's used to, down in the slit trench!"

"One thing you've got to keep in mind," Valya told him. "Pasting is much more dangerous. You'll have to pick the very best of the youngsters who copy out the leaflets: the kind that can hold out against anything, in case they're caught."

"There's plenty such. I've got some fine helpers."

"Are you sure you're not overestimating them?"

"Of course! Take Yura, for instance. His radio means more than life to him, now, yet he turned it over to you without a word."

"More than life!" Valya repeated, laughing. "What fine words you've learned to use!"

"Of course it means more," Sasha returned indignantly. "You know what the Germans do if they find a radio. They shoot you on the spot. And just the same, Yura didn't turn his

in, or break it up. Well, and anyway, if anyone does break down, nothing terrible can come of it. None of them knows who the others are, so the only one they can give away is me."

Valya looked at him intently.

"In any case," she said, "you'd better leave me their addresses. If anything should happen, I'll take your place."

"Can you hold out, Valya, no matter what they do?" he asked gravely, looking enquiringly into her eyes; and Valya suddenly realized how he had matured.

"Yes, Sasha," she answered, gravely as he had asked. "I'll hold out against anything they can do, and even more."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

One afternoon new hands, caught in a round-up on the market place, were herded into the open-hearth shop. Scanning their gaunt faces, Lutsenko recognized one of the newcomers—a collective farmer from his native village.

"Fedya!" he called.

The collective farmer looked up glumly. Then recognizing Lutsenko, he came hurrying up.

"Petro! Is it you?"

"Yes, worse luck."

"I'd never have guessed. You're skinny as a lath."

"I'll be skinnier, yet. It's only two months, and how many more months we still have to wait before the Red Army gets back! How are things out in the village?"

"There isn't any village. They burnt it down, the swine. Down to the ground."

"No! And where's my brother?"

"The Germans took him off, the devil knows where to. They shipped everyone in different directions."

"Did his house burn too?"

"I tell you, everything was burnt down to the ground. Nothing left but the chimneys, sticking up like crosses in a cemetery. Even the women and children—they shipped them all off."

Lutsenko hung his head. Year after year, he had spent his vacations in the country, with his brother, invariably turning down the trips to health resorts offered him by the trade union committee. "I'll never believe," he had liked to say, "that any health resort can do a man more good than our folks' collective farm."

The other workers had come up closer, attracted by the conversation.

"What was the trouble over?" Lutsenko asked, his eyes on the ground.

"Well, it was this way. Five days or so, it was, after our troops left, some German came around, with a bunch of soldiers to keep him safe. He appointed a starosta. Vasil Prokopich—remember him? The one that stayed out of the collective farm the longest."

"Yes, I remember him, all right."

"They started peacefully enough: divided up the land, something like ten hectares to a family."

"And you were tickled pink, I suppose, you old dirt-grubber!" put in Lutsenko viciously, glaring at his fellow countryman. "I still remember how you used to say, 'Ekhn, if I had some land! Five or six hectares, to hold on to till I die!'"

The collective farmer spat disgustedly.

"You've got a mean memory, Petro," he said. "Those times are dead and buried. And if you think I was tickled, I can tell you things.... What was there to be tickled about? The Germans didn't give us any tractors. They took all our horses. Nothing left but cows—the ones that were hidden properly. What could we do—hitch our dogs to the plough? And anyway, the Germans shot all the dogs. It's a funny thing,

the way the dogs hate those Germans! The minute they see one, they're like to snap their chains, they're so wild to get at him. Can there be some instinct tells them a Nazi's a thief?"

"Umph! Get back to the story," Lutsenko put in. "What happened after that?"

"After that? It happened this way. Before the week was out, a whole column of trucks came rolling up. On Saturday, that was. And another German, in a touring car. Shorter than the first one, he was, and broader in the shoulders...."

"Get back to the story, will you," Lutsenko shouted. "What do I care who was shorter, and who was broader? Tell us what happened."

"Well, and they burnt the village down," the collective farmer returned offendedly, and fell silent, seemingly absorbed in contemplation of the huge hole in his boot.

Lutsenko glared at him furiously.

"Stop interrupting, can't you?" demanded Opanasenko, who, like the others, had been listening with interest. "Let the man talk. He's got heartache enough, you can see."

"All right," Lutsenko agreed, more quietly. "Go ahead, then, Fedya. Only try and keep to the point."

"Suppose we sit down?" suggested the collective farmer, glancing at a nearby heap of bricks. "My feet ache so, I can hardly stand."

Lutsenko laughed.

"Try it," he said, "if you're anxious to get kicked behind. I'm not going to."

"Do they beat you up here, too, then?"

"What did you think, friend?" demanded Dyatlov. "That they're a different breed, here in town? The Germans are Germans, wherever they go. Fritzcs. See?"

Sasha, who had been watching the newcomer steadily, chuckled under his breath.

"Well," the collective farmer continued, "this same Fritz, he stood up in his car and said he was come for grain. Our grain. you see. He wanted us to turn it over. So Vasil Prokopich, being the starosta, he came out and said, 'Look here, Herr. You gave us the land. Of course it was ours anyway, but thanks, just the same, for not taking it away. Only as far as the grain's concerned—it wasn't grown on your land. It was grown on our own. collective, land. When we grow a harvest on your land. why, we'll be very pleased to turn over anything that's due. But the grain we've got now—you have no claim on it. You weren't here when it was sown, nor when it was harvested, either.' That's what our starosta said,

and nothing bad about it. Only that Fritz jumped out of his car like mad, and slashed Vasil Prokopich right across the face with a horsewhip, so the blood came spurting. Well, and you know Vasil Prokopich. Contrary as they come. It was contrariness kept him out of the collective farm so long. Contrariness with him, and crankiness with me. There was a pair of us.... That whip made him see red, and he caught the Fritz on the ear and sent him flying. And that was when the circus started. They shot Vasil Prokopich on the spot. The people all began to run, and the Fritzes let go on the crowd with their automatics. Then they drove us all out in the fields, and set the village on fire from all sides. and shipped everybody off in different directions. I managed to get away, but the rest of the folks...."

Sasha jerked Lutsenko's arm. Lutsenko looked up. and set hastily to work, with a brief command to his fellow countryman:

"Come on. swing that pick!"

The collective farmer stared bewilderedly.

Smakovsky was approaching them across the shop, with Lyutov fidgeting around him.

Stopping some distance off, the works manager pushed back his hat and looked the men over with every appearance of disgust.

"Poor work," he said, very loudly.

"The work's as good as the food," came someone's voice, ringing out over the sudden clatter of picks and shovels.

"Is there anything wrong with the food?" the works manager enquired.

"Taste it and see," the same voice replied.

Lyutov darted forward, trying to detect the speaker.

"For this sort of work, you'll get no food at all," the manager declared. "And talk like that will land you in concentration camp. It's about time you forgot the old order of things. There's a new order now."

He turned away, and Lyutov scurried to his side.

"That was Lutsenko grumbling," he said, whispering, although they were now too far for the workers to hear him. "It's Opanasenko spoils everything around here." He glanced sidewise, furtively, at the former head foreman, who was carrying two small bricks from one heap to another with obviously exaggerated effort. "He stayed of his own free will. Nobody asked him. And now he won't work himself, and won't let anyone else work either."

Lyutov was determined to gain the post of head foreman, should the works resume opera-

tion; and Opanasenko, as the only other qualified steelman who had remained in town, was a possible rival.

The works manager found only one crew to please his eye; and it was a small one—five men in all. Keeping far apart from the other workers, these five tried their hardest to gain the approval of the authorities. They were workers who had offered their services voluntarily. At first, Valsky had appointed them all foremen. Two days later, however, one of them—the most officious—had been injured by a steel ingot. “accidentally” dropped; and another had been openly threatened. As a result, preferring safety to honours, they had retired to less conspicuous activity.

After watching them for a while, Smakovsky looked in at the dining room. Here the air stank as in a garbage dump, and he turned hurriedly away, with barely a glance at the heaps of half-decayed potato peelings that occupied the larder shelves.

In the barrack assigned as dormitory, he found a hot stove in the corner contending vainly with the cold wind, which poured in relentlessly through glassless windows. A ragged youngster was at work with hammer and nails, trying to stop up the gaping windows with holey sheet iron.

Further, Smakovsky had had it in mind to inspect the power station. In this, however, he did not succeed. The station was guarded by a special SS detail, which bluntly refused him admittance. His documents as works manager made no impression on the commanding officer. Despite all pleas and arguments, the door was slammed in his face.

As soon as Smakovsky and Lyutov were gone, the workers dropped their tools and sat down, on heaps of brick or overturned barrows.

"What do you say we read some newspapers?" Sasha proposed, rolling a dung cigarette.

"What newspapers?" asked Opanasenko.

"The *Donetsky Vestnik*."

Opanasenko glanced at Sasha warily.

He had always been fond of the boy, pleased by his spirit and enterprise at work, and even by his unruly ways. Having no son of his own, he had regarded Sasha with feelings close akin to envy. "If I had a boy like that," he had often reflected, "I'd teach him all I know—make a foreman of him in two years! I'd cure his wildness, all right. He's wild because he's got no father. How can a mother keep that kind in hand?" Since the Germans had come, Opanasenko had turned away from Sasha, the "volunteer," with

disgusted hostility; but of late, convinced that the boy kept the workers' talk in the shop strictly to himself, he had begun to regard him with more friendly eyes.

"All right, boy. Read ahead," said Dyatlov. "We'll get hell again if they catch us smoking, but they can't say anything if we're reading that rag. It's their own paper."

"'Genuine Personal Liberty,'" Sasha read out. and paused to clear his throat.

The workers exchanged glances.

"Well, well," said Dyatlov encouragingly. "It certainly does sound interesting!"

"'The great German army has brought the Ukrainian people genuine liberation,'" Sasha continued loudly. "'At long last, we can be our own masters, and choose our occupations at will. Anyone is free to establish his own workshop, mill, or factory. Taxes have been abolished. We may forget them to the end of time. The new order is based on the principle of inviolability of private property. This gives full scope to private initiative. Develop commercial activities more energetically! Tradesmen and manufacturers are entitled to high incomes precisely because they are not rank-and-file philistines, but leaders, activists. We may say more: in present conditions, they are great men, vehicles of culture and

civilization. They carry out a noble mission. We already have a number of private stores; but what is holding up our remaining entrepreneurs? True, there is great difficulty in obtaining merchandise. But it must be procured, from the bottom of the sea if necessary. . . .”

“That’s enough of that!” put in Opanasenko. “There’s no deep-sea divers here. We’re ‘rank-and-file philistines,’ every one of us. ‘From the bottom of the sea!’” He snorted derisively.

“All right,” said Sasha, laying the paper aside and taking up another. “Let’s try the announcements, then. Here’s a big one: ‘Universal Labour Service for Civilian Population.’”

The announcement was set in very small type, and Sasha had difficulty in making it out in the unlit shop.

“‘I command,’” he read slowly. “‘First: all residents of the “Donetz” Oberfeldkommandantur are liable to labour service, from the age of fourteen. Second: consequently, said residents are obliged to obey any working orders which may be issued by the employment bureau. If so ordered, they are obliged to go to work away from their place of residence. Third: actions violating this order are punishable by fine, imprisonment, confiscation of property, or two or more of these penalties simultaneously.’”

"What do they mean, simultaneously?" demanded the collective farmer, who had seemed half asleep on his pile of bricks. "You can't take two skins off one ox."

Sasha read on:

"Penalty of death may be imposed. Signed, Oberfeldkommandant von Claire, General of Infantry."

Folding up the newspaper, he put it away and produced still another.

"Svetlana's over fifteen," said Opanasenko thoughtfully. "Why, she's still a baby! And here they say—fourteen. Yes, it's nicely put. Page one: personal liberty, and page two—hmph!"

The others made no comment. Sasha began a new article.

"In connexion with the arrival of Herr land director, the home of the starosta in the village of Petrovka was adorned with the trident—the Ukrainian arms...."

"Hold on! There's no trident in the Ukrainian arms," put in Lutsenko.

"That's the arms of the Ukrainian nationalists," Opanasenko explained.

"Well, why don't they say so, then: nationalist, not Ukrainian. Our Ukrainian arms are the sickle and hammer."

Sasha continued imperturbably:

"...with the trident—the Ukrainian arms—and a portrait of the Führer. Before the trident, on a special elevation, stood a wooden swastika, signifying that the Ukrainian nation belongs to the great Aryan race...."

Opanasenko sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"To the Aryan race? The Ukrainians? They've got another guess coming!"

"'Herr land director,'" Sasha continued, "explained the difference between the old and the new order in the countryside...."

"Drop it!" said Lutsenko. "There's the difference for you, with more holes on than clothes." And he pointed at his fellow countryman, now fast asleep on the bricks.

Sasha broke off. This article had not been marked for reading. He had started it on the spur of the moment, feeling that Lutsenko's fellow countryman offered an excellent object lesson on the new order in the countryside.

Articles and announcements had been selected and numbered in such order as to bring out their glaring contradictions. Valya said she had marked them herself: but the handwriting was not hers. Valya's writing was always neat and small, whereas the articles were numbered in a large, sprawling hand. Sasha asked no questions. He realized

that he was helping the underground Party organization, and this redoubled his spirit and confidence.

"Go on reading, sonny," said the cautious Dyatlov. "If they catch us doing nothing, we'll get no bread again."

"For the Lord's sake," Opanasenko pleaded, "give us a little rest. This stuff is poison. It stinks."

But Sasha, beginning a new article, read inexorably on:

"'Model order and cleanliness reign in the camps for Red Army men—prisoners of war. Despite food difficulties, the camp administration provides extra rations for the wounded.'"

"Wonderful rations," put in Lutsenko. "Three of them jumped out of a third-floor window. yesterday, they were so well-fed."

"I can tell you where their rations come from," said an elderly worker in ragged overalls, who had not said a word in all this time. "They've started a tallow meltery out in our settlement, and they drag in all the carrion they can find—horses, and dogs, and the devil knows what else. There's such a stink in the whole neighbourhood, it's just impossible to stand. The folks even went to the municipal board, to get the place closed down or moved out of town."

But they say—no, private enterprise must be encouraged. Well, and that's where they get the rations for the camp. You have to pinch your nose a mile away. And that's what they're supposed to eat."

He spat disgustedly.

This Sasha had not known. After the article on model conditions in the camp, he had been planning to read an item concerning war prisoners shot down in attempting escape. Now there was no need for this.

Lyutov came in sight, returning from his round of inspection. Dyatlov jerked Sasha's arm, muttering:

"Read, sonny, read."

While Sasha was unfolding a new paper, Lyutov came up and stood waiting, all attention. What were they reading? A leaflet?

There was no time to search for the next numbered article. Sasha began to read the first thing that caught his eye.

"The municipal board reminds all taxpayers that arrears on former state taxes—ground rent, cattle tax, income tax, and tax for cultural development—must be paid immediately."

"What do you mean, spreading lies like that," demanded Lyutov. Striding up to Sasha, he wrenched the paper from his hands and tore

it up. "Taxes are done away with for good. I read it myself, in No. 5."

"That was No. 5," Sasha retorted, "and this is No. 10."

"There can't be any collecting of old taxes now. I'll make you stop poisoning people's minds, you little son-of-a-bitch."

Opanasenko laid a heavy hand on Lyutov's shoulder.

"You, meister," he said, "don't you tear that paper. It's the Germans' paper, put out by the new authorities. I can beat you up for that, and never fear. And you'll have the Gestapo to answer to. We're having a talk here all about the new order, and you come interfering."

"But it's lies," Lyutov insisted—more quietly, however. Bending, he began to gather up the torn newspaper.

"What do you mean—lies?" demanded Sasha, growing bolder still. "Here, take another and read for yourself. Only don't tear it this time. Look, this one's about taxes too."

He pointed to one of the announcements in small type.

"Go ahead! Read it out loud!" the workers cried.

Lyutov read rapidly:

"Certain institutions and private individuals

hold the opinion that taxes need no longer be paid. This opinion is erroneous, and liable to severe punishment. Standartkommandant.' ”

The workers guffawed. The crestfallen “meister” sat down and ran through the announcement again, this time to himself.

“Keep going. Sasha.” Opanasenko commanded. “How can we get on without knowing all the orders of the new authorities?”

Glancing now and again at Lyutov, in open triumph, Sasha read out an order of the army commissary directing that watches and warm clothing be turned in for the use of the German army; an order from the Kommandant levying wagons and carts; an order from the municipal board levying stuffed furniture.

“Here’s one you can earn something on,” he continued, and read an order from the commander of the “Süd” rear-line territory, levying empty barrels, with a payment of 100 grams of millet per barrel.

“And here’s another.” Sasha seemed indefatigable. “The civilian commissary orders the population to turn in articles needed for automobile transport: old tyres, tubes, rubber, rubber overshoes, fats and oils.’ ”

“Don’t they want horse tails too?” asked Lutsenko caustically.

"Hey! Cut the foolishness!" Lyutov shouted. "Watch what you're saying!"

But Sasha put in:

"Why not? They need horse tails just as much as anything else."

And, after a brief search, he took up one of the papers and read out:

"All special agents are ordered to make the rounds of the households and clip the horses' manes and tails. Tails are to be clipped one hand-breadth below the last vertebra. Manes, no more than five centimetres from the root. Land office of the territorial land command."

Through screwed-up eyes, Opanasenko watched the look of growing consternation on the "meister's" face.

Sasha made up his mind to drive the lesson home.

"By the way," he asked, "have you got a cow?"

He knew very well that Lyutov had a cow and calf, which he had brought home from somewhere on his reappearance, the day after the Germans entered the town.

"Yes, but a lot of good it does me. I've nothing to feed it with, and it won't live long," Lyutov replied, in an effort to gain sympathy.

"See you don't let it die," Sasha warned him solicitously. "There's an order about cows in here, too. Anyone who lets their cattle die will be severely punished."

"Too bad for you, meister!" exclaimed Lutsenko, making no effort to conceal his enjoyment. "They'll clip your cow's tail off, and then, if it dies, they'll take both hides—yours, and the cow's."

Springing up, Lyutov shouted:

"Come on, come on, get back to work! You've had enough. Of all the things you pick to read!"

Reluctantly, the workers took up their shovels and barrows.

Sasha usually walked home from work alone. That evening, as he passed through the gates, Opanasenko caught up with him.

"Bring around some more of those papers, sonny," he said. "You know how to read, all right. And why don't you come out to my place some time? Svetlana gets no company, day in, day out. It's lonely for her. We'll have some tea, and talk things over."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Alexei Ivanovich Pysin was a reserved and untalkative man. His face, phlegmatically composed—his light, expressionless eyes—his low,

toneless voice, were not of a type that is easily remembered. Meeting him for the first time, people would forget him as soon as he was out of sight. Meeting him again, they would not recognize him.

Pyrin worked as master mechanic in the combustion bureau, where his interests were confined to the functioning of the control apparatus. For eight years, he had served as dues collector in his trade union group; but all attempts to draw him more actively into social life had failed. He attended meetings regularly, but had never been heard to speak at one.

Knowing his job to perfection, he easily eliminated all trouble arising in the most intricate apparatus. A passion for minute, painstaking labour, inherited from his father, who had been a watchmaker, would often keep him in the shops long after hours, bringing to rights some particularly capricious mechanism. He took great pleasure in repairing clocks and watches. Simple jobs did not interest him; but he would sit up all night, if need be, over some complicated problem.

At the works, when he had a free moment, he liked to visit the shops and watch the different apparatus in operation. What especially attracted him was the new system of automatic thermal

regulation recently installed in the open-hearth shop. Watching from a distance, he would smile condescendingly at the important air of the melter, pacing up and down beside the furnace. A good half of the melter's work was done for him by automatic appliances. And Pyrin would reflect:

"Think it's you that runs that furnace? No! I run it. It's my eyes, the ardometers, that see into the inmost secrets; my nose, the gas analyzer, that tests the smoke; my hands that regulate the amount of air, set and reset the instruments. A single appliance out of order, and all your fine importance will go flying!"

But the instruments seldom went out of order; and Pyrin was seldom remembered.

For several years, Alexei Ivanovich had shared an apartment with the Zambergs, who looked on him almost as one of their family.

Zamberg was called to the colours at the very outset of the war. In parting, he requested Pyrin to lend a helping hand, should it be needed, to his wife, Faina Solomonovna, and the two little girls.

Pyrin nodded silently.

When evacuation began, Alexei Ivanovich and Faina Solomonovna firmly made up their minds to leave. Not even when three-year-old Nina, the Zambergs' younger daughter, came down with

scarlet fever, did their decision change. But a few days later Lida, the elder daughter, also fell ill; and Faina Solomonovna began to waver. At first the evacuation trains had included special sleeping cars for the sick; but by the time Lida's illness was diagnosed, these were gone. Now the trains were made up entirely of freight cars. Tearfully, Faina Solomonovna decided to stay, despite Lida's pleas and protests. Pyrin decided to stay with them.

"It's fate, little Lida," he told his sobbing favourite. "We'll get along somehow. A watch-maker will never starve. He'll always be able to help others along."

They did not speak aloud of the real trouble that was gnawing at their hearts. It was too fearful for speech, too fearful even for thought.

After the German occupation of the town, Pyrin found employment in a private watch repairing shop. Only now did he realize how attached he had become to the comrades with whom he had worked so many years; how necessary to his well-being was the consciousness of useful labour, well and honestly performed. But he did not return to the works. He would not help the Germans.

Soon the Jewish congregation which the Germans had organized in the town issued announce-

ments calling upon all Jews to register immediately. Pyrin was far more upset by this than Faina Solomonovna. Try as he might to dissuade her from registering, she insisted stubbornly:

"It's an order, and I must obey. I don't want any trouble. Everyone's registering. Am I better than others? The congregation has a good leader—old Goltzman, the one that kept a store once, years ago. He's a smart old man. He knows what's what, and he won't betray us."

And next day, slipping quietly out of the house, Faina Solomonovna went to the registration office. She came home happier, thinking the danger averted.

Returning from work, one evening, Pyrin found the apartment empty. Enquiring next door, he learned that the Germans had taken Faina Solomonovna and little Nina. Neighbours, however, had managed to rescue Lida. Blue-eyed and fair-haired, she did not look Jewish, and they had persuaded the Germans that she was a Russian, Pyrin's housemaid.

Alexei Ivanovich hurried to town. In one night, a block of big three-storey buildings, badly damaged in the air attacks, had been fenced in with barbed wire. There was only one entrance, guarded by a large detail of army gendarmerie with big metal badges on their black

greatcoats. One after another, army trucks crowded with women, children, old people, turned in here. It was the ghetto.

Alexei Ivanovich joined the crowd watching from the other side of the street. He could do no good, of course, waiting out there; but he could not go home. He remained until darkness fell, when one of the gendarmes scattered the crowd by a burst from his automatic.

At home, Pyrin went to bed, but could not sleep. Lida had stayed with the neighbours, and he was glad of that. How could he have looked her in the eyes?

Every day, after work, Pyrin hurried to the ghetto gate and stood there among the crowd until it was too dark to see. Listening to the talk, he shared in all the fears and all the hopes of his fellow watchers. Some optimists declared that the Germans had set aside for the Jewish population an extensive territory, to which the ghetto inmates would eventually be shipped.

On Saturday, Pyrin's employer kept him at work longer than usual. It was already dark when, breathless with haste, he reached his customary watching place. But even in the darkness he saw at once that the ghetto no longer existed. There was no crowd in the street, no guard at the gate, no sign of life in the half-ruined buildings.

Paralyzed with shock, Alexei Ivanovich stood for a long time staring in at the open gate.

A passing patrol hailed him. He did not answer. They might have killed him, for it was forbidden, under pain of death, to appear in the streets at so late an hour. But, amicably inclined for once, they swung a rifle butt across his shoulders and let him go.

Pyrin moved slowly in the direction of the huge quarry where several mass shootings had already taken place. Halfway there, however, he turned sharply back towards home. Now he walked still more slowly, shuddering at the thought of what he must tell Lida. She must know the truth. And what would he tell Zamberg, when the Red Army returned?

At the Zambergs' open door, he stopped short in amazement.

On the couch, with Lida in her arms, lay Faina Solomonovna; in the crib lay Nina, fast asleep.

Faina Solomonovna described to him what she had gone through in the ghetto. She had been very fortunate. Finding one room with unbroken windows, the mothers had requisitioned it as a hospital for sick children. This had saved Nina's life. In the last few days, too, life in the ghetto had become a little easier. Now and then, they had even received hot food.

"Well, it's all over now," said Pyrin, drawing a long breath of relief. But Lida's reproachful glance stopped the words on his lips.

"No, it's not over, Alexei Ivanovich," Faina Solomonovna answered sadly, avoiding his eyes. "We're supposed to go back there in five days. The Germans say they'll send us to Palestine. But I'm not going back. Here, look at this."

From the bosom of her dress she produced a sheet of paper, with a brief, handwritten text. Over the text was a tiny red star. Pyrin had often heard of these leaflets. This, however, was the first that he had actually seen.

"Comrades," he read aloud, and his voice broke over the word, once so accustomed, now so rare and dear. "The organization of the Jewish congregation was a despicable trap. Many of you were fooled into registering because the Germans were backed by the bourgeois-nationalist elements still persisting among you. And what won these bourgeois hangers-on was the promise of passage to Palestine—the capitalist country they have always wanted to live in.

"The dispersal of the ghetto is a second foul Gestapo trap. Why did the Germans disperse the ghetto? Because not all, by far, had registered. The Germans want all the Jews, to the very last, to put their heads into the noose.

"Put no faith in the fascist hangmen, no faith in the bourgeois nationalists!

T. C."

"What do the letters at the bottom mean?" Pyrin asked.

Faina Solomonovna shrugged silently.

"It's the Town Committee, mother," Lida said, faintly, but with unshakable confidence. "It's our Soviet authority, still in town. We must trust it, as we always did. You're right. You mustn't go back to the ghetto."

By morning, everything was settled. Faina Solomonovna, with Nina, would go to live with friends in another part of town; Lida would remain with the neighbours, for she still needed care after her illness, and Pyrin would live at home, as usual.

When Lida fell asleep, Faina Solomonovna said softly:

"Alexei Ivanovich, whatever becomes of me, you must save Lida. It's my only request to you, my last request, maybe. Have I your promise?"

He bowed his head, turned grey in these last days, but did not speak.

Herr von Stammer, the Gestapo chief, had miscalculated. Very few returned to the ghetto

on the appointed day. Next morning, a new order was posted in the streets, in three languages: Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish.

All Jews residing in the town and its environs were ordered to report to the ghetto immediately, bringing their valuables, and also the keys to their apartments, with addresses attached. Those who failed to come would be shot. All persons concealing Jews would be shot.

The order was signed by the town Kommandant, Colonel Pfaul.

Faina Solomonovna stayed with her friends for several days. In the end, however, tormented by fear for these people who were sheltering her, she returned home. She was seized at once and thrown into the ghetto.

Again, every evening, Alexei Ivanovich hastened from work to the ghetto gate, to stand with the watching crowd until darkness fell. When he got home, Lida would hurry to him. During the day, he entrusted her to the neighbours, who had to watch sharply to prevent her from slipping away to join her mother in the ghetto. Intelligent far beyond her fifteen years, Lida never cried, never reproached. Only once, when Pyrin returned, thin and worn, from the evening's fruitless watching outside the ghetto, did she say:

"How I begged you and mother to take us away! What if Nina and I had died in the train? That would have been better than this. And mother would be safe!"

Alexei Ivanovich did not reply. What could he have said?

On Sunday, Lida insisted that he take her with him.

There were more people than usual in the street before the ghetto, that morning, and more gendarmes than usual on guard. The Kommandant's car stood just outside the gate. Clearly, something was in preparation.

As ten o'clock approached, the gendarmes began to drive the people off the street, onto the sidewalk opposite. Exactly at ten the gate swung open. An armed convoy appeared, and behind it. . . .

Until that moment, Pyrin had still cherished some vague, unreasoning hope. But when he saw these unfortunates he realized at once that they were being driven to the grave.

Dressed in strange rags, they came: mothers with children, women without children, children without parents, old people.

Faint with horror, Alexei Ivanovich looked into every passing face, hoping, yet fearing, to see Faina Solomonovna.

Was that not she, stumbling through the slush in stockinged feet? Was that not she, with a half-naked child in her arms? Was that not she, supported tenderly by two old women who themselves could barely walk?

The soldiers hurried them on, but still they looked into the crowd, seeking a parting glimpse of friends and loved ones. Someone in the crowd flung a warm jacket to one of the women, who was shivering in a torn bedroom wrapper. When she tried to catch it, a soldier pushed her roughly aside with the butt of his automatic. The jacket fell to the ground, and no one picked it up.

"Lida!"

The faint cry brought Pyrin to himself.

Faina Solomonovna was very near, with little Nina in her arms. Yes, those were her eyes, so big and dark. But the face? Shrivelled, emaciated, the face of an old, old woman!

"Faina Solomonovna!" Pyrin cried. He pushed along the sidewalk opposite the column of condemned, straining to hear her last words. Feverishly, he tightened his grip on Lida's arm.

"Farewell," Faina Solomonovna whispered. Unable to tear her eyes from Lida's face, she faltered and stood still.

A soldier swung up his gun and struck her with the butt.

Her head jerked back, and her arms dropped. Nina fell onto the slushy pavement. The mother knelt to lift her child, but the soldier flung the little girl away with a brutal kick.

"Mother!"

With unexpected strength, Lida wrenched her arm free. Raising her mother, she walked on by her side.

Pyrin hurried to Nina: but something roared deafeningly, and he dropped face down on the pavement.

When he opened his eyes, the column of condemned was gone. That was the first thing he saw. Lida, too, was gone.

Strangers helped him to his feet. Then he saw Nina, wrapped in a coat, in the arms of a girl in a light summer dress. Someone offered him a handkerchief, he could not understand what for. Then pain made him raise a hand to his ear. It was covered with blood.

"Can you walk?" the girl asked. Her face was pale and stern.

Pyrin nodded.

They turned down a narrow, unfamiliar street. The girl walked ahead, with Nina in her arms. She walked slowly, and Pyrin hurried, ah! how

he hurried after her. Yet he could not catch up, could not come close enough to look at Nina. They walked endlessly, he thought; but when he glanced back, it was only two blocks.

In somebody's room, Nina was undressed and laid down in a bed, while Pyrin stared glassy-eyed at the tiny body, already turning blue.

Thus did Serdyuk find them, at Maria Grevtsova's. Seeing a stranger in the room, Serdyuk was about to leave; but the man's eyes held him.

Bending over the bed, he took the child's cold hand in his and sought the pulse. Then he laid it gently down, and bared his head.

Looking in at Maria's again, a few days later, Serdyuk found Pyrin there once more.

Alexei Ivanovich told them all that had happened. He told his story in low, even tones---so low and even that Serdyuk's hair bristled.

And Serdyuk knew that this man could be trusted.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Slowly, haltingly, consciousness returned.

"What's the matter?" Krainev asked. He tried to sit up, but his head seemed glued to the pillow.

The nurse, a German woman with rusty-coloured eyebrows, motioned him to lie still. She poured a spoonful of some liquid into his mouth, and left the room. Krainev tried to turn his head. Pain shot through his temple. Raising a hand, with great difficulty, he touched his forehead. It was bandaged. Vaguely, as from a great distance, came the recollection of a shot fired at him. Days and events slowly took shape in memory.

Who was this man who had condemned him to death? A member of the Soviet underground, commissioned by his organization? Or simply a rank-and-file patriot, representing no organization, acting on his own? Whoever he was, how he must have hated Krainev!

But again memory clouded, and Krainev lost consciousness.

Waking once more, he tried to move his limbs. Both arms obeyed, and one leg. The other leg lay motionless. Motionless, too, lay his head, heavy as though all the weight of his body were concentrated here.

Food was brought: hot beef broth. He drank it down eagerly.

In the afternoon, the silent nurse brought him milk and white bread. He drank the milk, but could not eat the bread. His temple hurt when he attempted to chew.

A doctor came in. Sergei Petrovich recognized him: the town's oldest physician, a general practitioner. Irina had consulted him about Vadim. He was consulted in all needs and all emergencies, including such as required surgical ability.

The doctor did not answer Krainev's questions. He did not seem to hear them. The nurse was silent as before. Out in the hall, the doctor talked both in Russian and in German; yet when he entered the room he appeared to lose the gift of speech.

Many days passed. The doctor came often, by day and by night. He felt Krainev's pulse, moved the stethoscope over his chest, changed the bandages regularly. But he answered no questions. Krainev shouted and cursed, hoping to provoke some word of anger. And still he could read nothing in the old man's eyes but cold indifference.

One day, as the doctor wrote out a new prescription, Krainev noticed the date at the top: November twentieth.

Vadim's birthday! The sixth. This year, Krainev had promised to buy the boy a pedal automobile. He recalled Vadim's nursery, with its rich store of toys. And his mind slipped back to his own childhood. What toys had he had to play with, little S-ryozha Krainev, when he was

six years old? Empty match boxes, a rag ball, knucklebones. Only once in his life had he had a real toy: a wooden horse, daubed in ridiculous colours, with a moth-eaten tail and a head too large for its body. Many years had since passed; but Sergei Petrovich still remembered clearly his ecstatic joy at the realization that this treasure was his own.

Krainev had tried to give his son all that he himself had lacked in childhood, all that had filled his childish dreams. Once every week, he had taken the boy to town and allowed him to choose any toy on the store shelves that pleased him. And invariably, on such days, Sergei Petrovich had recalled another day, long past.

On that day, the gendarmes seized his uncle Grigori. Seryozha ran to his father, full of bewildered questions; and his father told him:

"Your uncle wanted to bring us all a new life, so I could buy you a fresh toy every Sunday."

Seryozha's father, Pyotr Krainev, did not live to enjoy this new life, in which the finest, the most cherished dreams could be fulfilled.

An active participant in the working-class movement, he was compelled to go into hiding when Whiteguard bands seized the mining town in which he lived. Every evening the boy, Ser-

yoza, with a loaf of bread under his coat, would set out across the steppe towards a distant mine. Entering the adit, he would light a candle and pick his way to the first crosscut. Here he would stop and whistle, long and piercingly. Echo would multiply his signal many times over. And then, when the echo died, Seryozha would hear an answering whistle. Soon heavy footsteps would sound in the distance. A miner's lamp would glimmer, nearer, nearer, and Pyotr Krainev would appear out of the shadows. The boy would give his father the bread he had brought, and relate all he knew of developments in the town. He was only thirteen, but life had already taught him to see and to understand.

Usually, Seryozha would return home immediately. Sometimes, however, his father allowed him to stay in the mine overnight.

They would settle down in a distant stope, on a bed of straw brought from the deserted underground stable, and talk for hours in the darkness.

Never before had they talked so much together, never before had Seryozha been so deeply attached to his father, as in these stern, perilous days. Seryozha's mother had died when he was only eight. His father, coming home from the mine at night, had always been too tired for

talk; and the boy had learned to treasure every moment his father could spare him.

One day, no answer came to Seryozha's whistled signal. He repeated the call over and over. Echo took it up, and died in the distance. Then he moved on down the mine. He knew the way by now; but how far it seemed!

Passing the stable, Seryozha whistled several times again. Again no answer.

"Father's asleep," he told himself, and swung on, quickening his step lest the candle burn out before he reach the stope. The hot tallow kept rolling down onto his fingers.

He found his father asleep. Dropping the guttering candle end, he sat down on the straw.

Should he wake his father? Better not. If father woke late enough, he would let the boy stay, and again they could talk till morning.

Seryozha lay down and began to dream about the happy time to come, when they would leave their mud hovel in the Kenneltown settlement and move to a bright, roomy house in town; when his father would not work from morning to night, but only half the day, and in the evenings they would read at home together, and go to the cinema, sometimes.

"How sound father sleeps," he thought, after some time, when the stillness began to oppress

him. He called. His father did not stir. Then he touched his hand. It was cold as ice. Cold as mother's hand, when they had brought her home.

"Father!" he cried. With trembling fingers, he lit a match.

His father's face was covered with blood. A bullet wound gaped just above one eyebrow. Seryozha's knees gave, and he dropped into the straw, sobbing bitterly.

The tears were all wept out, but he did not move.

At times he began to think that it had all been a dream, that he need only call, and his father would draw a long, deep breath, would sit up and reach out a strong, work-pitted hand to stroke the boy's cheek, as he liked to do.

"Father!" the boy would call, and wait, with bated breath, for the response that did not come.

How much time passed, Seryozha did not know. Making up his mind, at length, that he must go, he pressed his tear-stained cheek, in a last caress, to his father's icy fingers, and moved reluctantly away.

For many hours he wandered through the underground passages; but he could not find his way out of the mine. In the end, his strength failed utterly, and, losing hope, he sank to the ground to wait for death.

In truth, he was very near to death when he was found by one of his father's miner comrades, come to call Pyotr Krainev home; for the town had been freed from the Whites.

This miner took the orphaned boy into his home.

Then Uncle Grigori came back from his exile in far Siberia, and adopted Seryozha. From that time on, Seryozha Krainev's life proceeded in a straight line, forward and always forward: school, work in an iron and steel plant, military service, work again—new and ever more absorbing—and study.

Now the straight line had ended suddenly in a sharp turning. Where to?

... Krainev's recovery was slow. He was very weak. But in his waking hours his mind laboured incessantly over the problem of his further conduct. If he went to work for the Germans, patriots would make away with him, perhaps before he could cause the foe the slightest damage. Yet what other course could he adopt?

And finally decision came. He must get the Germans to employ him at the works; and at the works he must immediately seek contact with the underground.

This settled, Krainev felt a new desire to live. He stopped refusing food.

One evening, Pfaul came in to see him. The German's arm was in a sling. Sergei Petrovich smiled with pleasure, thinking:

"Ah, so you got it too! But what a shame you came off so easy!"

The Kommandant smiled back. Sitting down, he lit a cigarette, and offered one to Krainev.

"The doctor says that the sick man iss well. Soon can he work," Pfaul began, blowing smoke rings and watching them melt slowly into the air.

Sergei Petrovich nodded.

"I think you will not to be frightened for to help Germany. Und you will gut work in the police administration."

"I'm ready to help," said Krainev determinedly. "but —only at the works."

"Your hand iss strong. A such hand must to work in the police administration, for to catch more partisans. It iss there less dangerous. You will haff guards. In the works you will be again killed."

"No, nowhere but the works. I'm an engineer, after all," Krainev returned, raising himself on his elbow in the energy of his protest.

The Kommandant blew another smoke ring; but this time he did not watch it.

"You must gut think," he said significantly. "Against you iss more feeling than iss against us."

At the Kommandantur stood I und the chief from Gestapo, Herr von Stammer." Sergei Petrovich recalled the slit-mouthed, close-cropped German. "The partisan iss shoot first you, then us. The doctor did not want to cure. I threatened, much I threatened, I showed the revolver. I said, 'Kraineff iss alive, or you are dead.' I sent a surgeon's assistant." Pfaul indicated the nurse, who was standing at the window. "She iss watch over the doctor. und you are alive. In the works will you be made dead."

"I won't go to the police," Krainev repeated stubbornly. "I'm an engineer, and I belong at the works."

The Kommandant did not answer. He was displeased.

The Russian was alive. Thus had it been ordered by von Stammer, lest Krainev's death frighten away other local people working in the auxiliary administrative system. The town authorities had demonstrated their solicitude for those who assisted Germany. That was well. But it was not well that this Russian refused to serve in the police.

However, Pfaul reflected, recalling the leaflets, a strong hand was needed at the works as well. And with this thought he said, rising to go:

"Fery well. I shall recommending you to the owner from the works—Baron von Wechter."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The People's Commissariat resembled a huge ant hill. Vestibule, corridors, waiting rooms were crowded with people. The People's Commissar was in conference, and Makarov went downstairs to pass the hours of waiting. Outside the personnel department, as usual, the hall was particularly crowded. People gathered here to exchange views and impressions, to discuss plans and jobs, to argue, or simply to wait, pacing up and down the corridor, until their documents were ready.

Again and again, in the general buzz of conversation, Makarov heard the names of the big Eastern works: Magnitogorsk, Petrovsk, Amurstal.

Passing by one group, where the talk was very animated, Makarov heard repeated mention of the Alchevsk works. He stopped to listen.

The Alchevsk folk were returning to the Donbas. One of their trains, already unloaded at Chusovoi, was being hastily loaded again. The remaining trains had already turned back. The German offensive on the Donbas front was halted.

Until this moment, Makarov had not much cared where he was sent to work. There had been moments when he longed for isolation at some remote little plant—one of the old Urals works, perhaps. At other moments, he had hoped for an

appointment to one of the big works—Tagil, Kuznetsk, Magnitogorsk. In the end, he had made up his mind to take whatever was offered. Now, however, his heart ached to be as near the Donbas as possible.

It was well past midnight before he was received.

The People's Commissar had altered greatly since Makarov's last visit. His dark skin had turned sallow, and his eyes had sunk into deep hollows. But their expression remained unchanged.

"I'm sorry you had to wait so long," he said. "but I'm kept very busy.... Well, how is the youngster getting on?"

"He's out of danger, thanks."

"I know that. The doctor reported. But how does he feel?"

"Much better."

"I'm very glad. Now, what sort of reception did you find out there?"

"Simply amazing. So many trains coming in to the works, so many people—and they find quarters for all. Within three or four hours everyone has a home."

"It's not that well organized everywhere. In some places, people are kept in their railway cars for days. Can you start work yet?"

"Yes."

"Forgive me for saying so, Comrade Makarov, but it has always seemed to me that work is the best remedy for grief. Isn't that so?"

Makarov nodded.

"I've decided to place you at a big works, in a big job. I'm appointing you under Rotov, as manager of his No. 2 open-hearth shop."

Makarov did not reply. A big job—as manager of a single shop, for a former chief engineer! And to make matters worse, his family was living in the home of the present manager of this very shop, engineer Grigoryev. How cordially he had taken them in, with what heartfelt sympathy!

"Disappointed?" asked the People's Commissar.

Makarov hesitated.

"Surprised, then?"

"I suppose the shop is in very bad shape?"

"No. It keeps up to plan. But what's the plan, now? The South is gone. We have only the East. Output cut down by half, and requirements infinitely increased. The plan is law, and non-fulfilment would be crime. No, the appalling thing about this shop is, that its manager thinks he's reached the limit, thinks there's no more room for advance. He's perfectly satisfied with himself and with what he's achieved, and that's the very

death of an engineer. I ask him, 'How goes it?' He answers, 'Splendid! A hundred and two per cent.' I say, 'Can't you make it more?' And he says, 'No.' The shop is putting out six hundred and fifty thousand tons. It's got to be brought up to a million tons a year. That's a big job, and it will take time."

"I see, Comrade People's Commissar," said Makarov quietly.

"And it's not a job that every engineer could handle. Another difficulty is, the director. You'll have to get on with him, somehow, and that's no easy task."

"Why?"

There was a pause before the People's Commissar replied.

"You see," he said finally, "Rotov is a big man, an outstanding director. He's done a lot for the works. They have everything right to hand, due to his efforts—auxiliaries that any works in the Union might envy. A dairy farm and creamery of their own, a slaughterhouse, a canning plant—everything needed to keep the workers well supplied. But he's a hard man to get along with—brusque, and iron-willed. And you're rather sensitive. Though, after all, you got on with Dubenko all right, didn't you?"

"Where's Dubenko now?" Makarov asked.

"Working for the People's Commissariat of Defence, collecting scrap iron on the battlefields."

"Oh! You've been too hard on him!" Makarov could not help exclaiming.

The People's Commissar frowned.

"Hard? No, I've been softer than he deserved. They'll teach him, there, to obey orders. And to think more about human lives. Just look at his methods: sending his chief engineer to carry messages: leaving a shop manager in the lurch with the Germans coming. What sort of director do you call that? And then—those seven number threes! There's a backhanded service for you! I can't ask anything any more, in the Railways Commissariat. I've telephoned a few times, trying to speed up trains that are badly needed, and every time they say, 'You'll have seven threes again.' The power station—well, I won't mention that. You can't give a man more brains than he has, and the enemy turned out to be smarter. But he might have obeyed orders, at the very least."

The People's Commissar was clearly angry, and Makarov regretted his attempt to defend Dubenko. It could do no good now.

"Well, success to you," the People's Commissar said abruptly, holding out his hand. "Remember: the aim is a million tons. If necessary, telephone. Your call will be put through to me."

As Makarov was leaving, the People's Commissar called suddenly after him:

"Leather boots—is that how you travel in these frosts? And a cloth coat, I suppose?"

Makarov nodded, flushing.

"Leaders, administrators! Couldn't provide yourselves warm clothes! Did you take care of the workers. at least?"

"The workers, yes."

"That's better."

Phoning his secretary, the People's Commissar ordered:

"See that Makarov is issued felt boots, a sheep-skin coat, and a fur hat."

And, laying down the receiver, he told Makarov once more:

"Remember: a million tons."

After boxcars and open flatcars, a berth in a sleeping car was unaccustomed luxury. Makarov stretched out in delicious comfort. and proceeded to make up for lost sleep. Even his dreams were tranquil and happy, and he woke up smiling. But at once came the memory of the little grave, at a distant by-station in the open steppe. Vasili Nikolayevich turned his face to the wall and tried to get to sleep again. Someone jogged his shoulder impatiently. The other passengers were

getting their things together. The train was slowing down.

Coming uphill from the railway station, Makarov turned into one of the streets of the works settlement. Elena was living here, with Vadim, in the home of engineer Grigoryev, manager of No. 2 open-hearth shop at the works.

It was early, and nobody was stirring. Makarov lifted his hand to ring the bell, but paused irresolutely. He did not want to wake Elena. And above all, he did not want to wake the Grigoryevs. He would not have hesitated so, perhaps, did he not carry in his pocket an order from the People's Commissar appointing him manager of the shop which Grigoryev had headed for so many years.

Makarov glanced up and down the street. It was a long, straight thoroughfare, lined on either side with handsome two-storey cottages.

At one time, these cottages had been occupied by foreigners: representatives of firms supplying equipment for the new works, assembly experts, consulting engineers.

The cottage in which Grigoryev lived was still called "Sayle's," after the foreign engineer who had once occupied it.

British by birth, American by passport, engineer Sayle had spent much of his life in the

United States, where he was considered an outstanding expert on large-capacity open-hearth furnaces. He moved about the world, a typical knight of the profit Grail, pausing wherever the pay, at the moment, was highest. In the early 'thirties, capitalist Europe built no open-hearth furnaces, and the United States had engineers enough and to spare. Sayle went to Russia, where the pay was best. When the first group of furnaces at the new works had been built, he accepted an invitation to stay on as consulting engineer.

Sayle was unhurried in his movements; unhurried in his speech; unhurried in his work. Every heat dragged endlessly; and between heats the furnaces were cooled, on pretext of increasing the durability of the bottoms. Two heats, or 250 tons of steel, per furnace - such was the daily output. To Sayle's mind, this was more than sufficient.

In the United States, Sayle had worked through a lengthy period of depression, when furnaces were run at fifty per cent of capacity; when they were kept barely warm, on low gas over Sundays, and heated up again unhurriedly on Mondays; when neither the domestic nor the foreign market had any need of steel.

And this spirit Sayle tried persistently to enforce upon the new Soviet works as well. He was

ruthless in his persecution of all who opposed or disagreed. No violation of furnace practice, no breakdown even, could rouse him to such fury as a high-speed heat.

"Savages! Asians!" he would yell, flourishing his squat briar pipe. Driving the guilty melters from the furnaces, he would demand their immediate discharge.

The Soviet country sent its best steelmen to this shop, from the best of the older works; but Sayle's threats and curses kept them helpless at the splendid furnaces, unable to apply their skill and knowledge.

Besides the high pay, Sayle was kept at the works by his inveterate vanity; for the chief engineer, Georgi Apollonovich Stokovsky, hung on his every word.

Six furnaces were already in operation; and the Russian workers at all six furnaces made no attempt to hide their disgust with Sayle's American style of work. Now one crew, now another would put through a high-speed heat. Conflicts arose almost daily between Sayle and the shop manager, engineer Grigoryev. The shop manager had the support of the director; the American consultant—the support of the chief engineer.

One day there was serious trouble. Pavel Tsygankov, a melter from the South, was sick

of the bitter frosts, of the short Northern summer, of his living quarters in the big apartment house. And above all, he was sick, fed up, disgusted to the point of nausea, with Sayle. The American had twice had Tsygankov discharged; and twice Grigoryev had reinstated him. In the end, the melter made up his mind to go home to Mariupol, where the furnaces were small, perhaps, but the temperatures were high; where steel was made at the speed he knew so well how to achieve. There he had been looked up to as one of the best. Here, he was reprimanded precisely for the sort of work that had gained him prominence there.

And so, Tsygankov determined to be off for Mariupol; but he determined, also, to leave with a proper display of fireworks.

During the night shift, when Sayle was safe in bed—Russian vodka downed him, he had found, far more efficiently than whiskey—Tsygankov finished a heat in eight and a half hours, instead of the regulation twelve. He did it easily, with no perceptible strain; and, when it was done, gasped at the realization of how much steel could be gotten out of these furnaces, were they only run with spirit—could the melters only dare to keep the roof temperature at the maximum.

Entering the shop next morning, Sayle got into his special tarpaulin coat and kneepads, sent for his enormous blue glass, and proceeded to inspect the furnaces. All was well. Then he went up to the bulletin board where the duration of the processes was posted—and his pipe dropped out of his gaping mouth. This time, however, he was given no chance to shout or curse. As he began gesticulating, still speechless with anger, Tsygankov laughed in his face, spat contemptuously, and strode out of the shop, intending never to return.

Grigoryev met Tsygankov on the broad marble staircase. The melter's cap was tilted jauntily, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He was singing one of the lilting Donbas songs; but there was an angry glitter in his eyes.

Briefly, he told Grigoryev what had happened. Grigoryev said nothing, but, taking the melter by the arm, pulled him back to the shop.

Sayle was still standing by the bulletin board, scarlet and spluttering. A stop must be put to these nob dies—these mere melters—these Tsygankovs, thinking they could blow up the very foundations of the American school!

Grigoryev, pale with suppressed anger, went up to the American and asked whether the furnace had been damaged.

"No," Sayle replied, without so much as a glance at the shop manager.

"In that case, Tsygankov will go on working."

"Then I'll get out!" Sayle shouted suddenly. "And for good. To the devil's grandmother!"

He had grown quite proficient in the use of Russian curses.

"Well and good! Get out, then!" returned Grigoryev, pointing to the door.

Flinging down his blue glass, which shattered into tiny fragments, Sayle hurried out of the shop, got into his car, and sped away.

Grigoryev telephoned the director, who came to the shop at once. When Grigoryev had explained the morning's incident, the director himself examined the furnace, and then sent for the chief engineer.

Stokovsky, knowing nothing of what had occurred, approached the furnace with evident reluctance. Was it his job to attend to such trifles? His job was leadership, general guidance. Abroad—there things were different! There even a shop manager would not stoop to examine furnaces. It was entirely the head foreman's business.

Only when the chief engineer had given the furnace a thorough examination, and pronounced

it in perfect order, did Grigoryev inform him of Sayle's departure.

"This is a serious matter," Stokovsky exclaimed, glancing meaningly at the director.

Turning to Grigoryev, he added:

"As to you, young man, you ought to be learning from Sayle. That's what we keep him for. He has twenty years of experience abroad behind him—a rich past, a great store of knowledge. And what have you?"

"I?" cried Grigoryev furiously. "I? I have the future of a Soviet engineer, in the Soviet land."

Stokovsky smiled coldly, and went off to urge Sayle to return to the shop.

But the consultant was adamant.

"It's either me or Grigoryev," he declared obstinately, in reply to all persuasion.

He had already sent off telegrams of protest to his embassy, to the Foreign Department of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, and to the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs.

The chief engineer returned to the works in a very nervous frame of mind.

"Things are taking a bad turn," he said glumly, avoiding the director's eyes. "We'll have to part with Grigoryev."

"No, we won't," the director returned.

"Ivan Sergeyevich! Do you prefer to pay for breach of contract? And get in trouble with the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs? They'll snow you under with telegrams, and drive you mad by telephone calls. And why should we lose Sayle?"

"The heats are dragged out," the director said irritably. "The furnaces don't produce enough. And your Sayle thinks everything is as it should be."

"Speeding up the heats means reducing the durability of the furnaces, and lowering the quality of the steel. There are definite standards worked out, if you'll excuse my saying so, by men who know a little more than you or me. And in America...."

The director cut him short with an impatient gesture.

Telegrams came pouring in, alternating with interminable telephone conversations. Losing patience, the director left for Moscow.

Straight from the train, he went to the People's Commissariat.

Orjonikidze received the director cordially, questioning him about the progress of the construction work and enquiring what help was needed. Writing out an order for delivery of an

additional charging machine and teeming crane, he remarked:

"These are American. But it's the last time. The next you get will be our own, Soviet machines."

When the discussion of works problems was done, the People's Commissar said lightly:

"Look here, Comrade Siberian bear, what's this I hear about you clawing up your American consultant?"

"Just a surface scratch," the director answered uncomfortably.

"That's bad. That's very bad," said the People's Commissar. "If you use your claws at all, you should use them thoroughly."

The director's face cleared.

"With pleasure," he exclaimed.

"Yes. I know you're willing. But it has to be done intelligently. I'm convinced, with you, that the shop would work better if Grigoryev had full charge, with no interference from Sayle. Well, then, give us concrete proof that it really would."

The director looked across the desk enquiringly.

"I've never liked the Solomon type of decisions," the People's Commissar went on, "but in this case we'll have to try one. Divide the

shop. Give three of the furnaces to Grigoryev, and three to Sayle. And time will show. How much steel do you average now per square metre of furnace bottom? A little over three tons, I believe?"

"Three and fifteen hundredths."

"Good. Raise it to six, on Grigoryev's three furnaces." The People's Commissar smiled. "Agreed?"

"Comrade Sergo!" the director pleaded. "The Americans don't get over four."

"And what's our slogan? 'To overtake and outstrip the capitalist countries.' Isn't that so? To outstrip them! And you talk about American standards. Now, what about your chief engineer? All for Sayle, isn't he?"

"All for Sayle," said the director, sighing.

"Then you stand up for Grigoryev. And remember: it's a question of principle. The American school versus the Russian school."

Six tons per square metre of furnace bottom! Grigoryev gasped at the figure, but at once set eagerly to work. The furnace bottoms, which Sayle had built up to a thickness of a full metre, were thinned down by a quarter, a third, in the end—a half. The capacity of the furnaces increased from 125 tons to 150, then 175, and, finally, 200 tons each.

Stokovsky pleaded, argued, fulminated. He wrote official memorandums: circumstantial, voluminous, larded with detailed mathematical and thermotechnical calculations, with references to articles published in German, British, and American magazines. They were veritable scientific treatises, these memorandums, in all but their concluding passages, which the chief engineer devoted to a disclaimer of all responsibility for the state of furnaces and equipment, for the quality of the steel, and for the lives of the workers.

At first, the director read every such "opus" attentively. Later, he would glance only at the end. Encountering the usual conclusion, he would scrawl on the front page, without further ado: "File of correspondence with chief eng." Contemplating the bulky folders, the director's secretary would wonder vaguely where the chief engineer found time to mar so much good paper.

Only in one point was Stokovsky right. It was a risky business when cranes built to lift two hundred tons were used to lift two hundred and fifty.

Half of the works designing department was rallied to Grigoryev's assistance, recalculating the crane bridges, trolleys, cables, and hooks, and the ladle trunnions. There still remained a wide

margin of safety. The cranes were inspected before and after every heat.

Sayle worked on as always, waiting confidently for the "Asians" to ruin their furnaces and cranes. But month after month slipped by, and nothing was ruined. In the fourth month of the contest, Grigoryev put out twice as much steel as Sayle.

The "Americans," as the melters at Sayle's furnaces had been nicknamed, watched Grigoryev's "Russians" enviously, especially when the red glow rising every nine or ten hours over each of the "Russian" furnaces announced the tapping of another 200-ton high-speed heat.

The durability of the furnaces was not reduced. The quality of the steel did not deteriorate.

The American consultant became an object of ridicule, at first furtive, later open and undisguised. Particularly unpleasant were his encounters with Tsygankov, now the leading melter of the "Russian" shop. Tsygankov always tipped his cap respectfully; but the mocking light in his eyes would drive Sayle frantic.

The day Grigoryev's furnaces attained an output of six tons per square metre of bottom, the director informed the consultant that his services were no longer needed.

Sayle left. Grigoryev took over the entire shop, and moved into the cottage Sayle had occupied.

Makarov stood outside the door, unable to make up his mind. The weather was too cold for standing still, and he finally strode away, up the street, to warm his numbing limbs. After some time, the street dwindled into a narrow footpath, leading up a high, but gradual slope. Makarov lit a cigarette and walked slowly on. The top of the rise, he thought, should offer a good view of the works and the town.

He was not mistaken. The slope broke off abruptly, in a straight drop to big open workings, from which trainloads of ore were moving towards the sintering plant, far off to the side. Immediately beyond the workings began the streets of the town, sloping upwards to end, on a distant hillside, in a sweeping semicircle of big, four-storey buildings.

Between the town and the works lay a wide asphalt highway, dotted with speeding automobiles. Beside the highway stretched a streetcar line.

The works occupied an enormous territory, bounded in the distance by a river, with a high dam. Towards the centre of this territory loomed

a fire-breathing array of blast furnaces. A little further stood the open-hearth shop, with light puffs of smoke rising over its tall stacks and melting away into the frosty air, as over gun muzzles when a charge has just been fired. Further still were the buildings that housed the pit furnaces, ringed in by a palisade of slender black stacks, and then the blooming mill shop. Beyond all these, in every direction, the early morning light shone back from the flat, glazed roofs of numberless other shops. From Makarov's high vantage point, they resembled gigantic hot-beds.

Looking out over this majestic scene, Makarov caught his breath in wondering admiration. He stood there for a long time, turning his eyes now to the enormous cylindrical gas holders, connected by a fine network of pipe lines with the coking and chemical plant; now to the railway station; now to the open steppe, flat as the steppe he had left behind in the Donbas; now to the far horizon line, where mountains bulked blue and high.

Ten years before, visiting the site of the projected works during a vacation trip, Makarov had looked out over this same stretch of land. Then he had seen only a building site; today, he saw a gigantic works, operating at full ca-

capacity and at the same time continuing to build and grow.

Trains of coke, of ore, of limestone rolled up to the blast furnaces. From the blast furnaces moved heavy ladles of hot metal; from the open-heartli' shop, trainload after trainload of crimson ingot moulds, filled with slowly cooling steel; from the finishing bays of the rolling mill shops, cars loaded for shipment.

And a hot pride rose in Makarov's heart—pride in the leader whose farsceeing genius had planned this mighty fortress of national defence in the unpeopled steppe; pride in the Soviet people, who had carried out their leader's plan, building up a works unparalleled in any land; pride in himself, as one of this great and mighty people.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Reluctant to disturb his wife, Makarov tiptoed down the hall as softly as he could. Elena was awake, however, and met him in the doorway of their room. He took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

"How's Vadim?" he asked.

"Much better. Almost well," she replied, her eyes brimming with sudden tears. How anxiously

he had asked about the child—just as he had always asked about their own son, when he had been ill. It was good to feel his concern. But it was hard to bear.

Elena was very pleased when he told her that they would be staying on here. She had feared the effect of further travelling on Vadim.

"There's one bad side to it, though," Vasili Nikolayevich continued, sighing. "I've been appointed to Grigoryev's job."

"How unpleasant!" Elena cried regretfully. "They're such nice people, both of them, and took us in so cordially, and—a thing like that! I wish it hadn't turned out that way."

"I'd like to avoid seeing him at home, this morning. It would be impossible not to tell him, and it's not a pleasant thing to tell."

"Then stay in the room and don't show yourself till he's gone to work. You can wash up afterwards."

But the meeting was not to be avoided.

There was a tap at the door, and Grigoryev came cautiously in, on tiptoe, with an anxious glance at the crib in the corner.

"Don't worry about Vadim," Elena said, offering her host one of his own chairs. "He sleeps very soundly."

Sitting down, Grigoryev turned his lively eyes, framed in early wrinkles, to Makarov.

"Where are they sending you?" he asked, without preliminary. Inasmuch as Vasili Nikolayevich had been summoned to the People's Commissariat, Grigoryev had taken it for granted that he would be sent off somewhere; for all appointments at the local works were made by Rotov himself.

Hospitable and kindly, the Grigoryevs had grown warmly attached to the Makarovs in these weeks, had shown the most heartfelt attention to their needs, the deepest sympathy for their bereavement.

"We won't let you and Vadim go anywhere before the spring," Grigoryev's wife had told Elena, when Makarov left for Sverdlovsk. "You mustn't tempt fate twice. When warm weather sets in, it will be time enough for you to join your husband in Zakamsk, or Ufaei, or wherever it is they send him."

Meeting Grigoryev's enquiring, sympathetic glance, Vasili Nikolayevich turned his eyes away in embarrassment. For a moment, he searched vainly for words. Then, silently, he took the order for his appointment from his pocket and laid it on the table.

Grigoryev took it up and read it through. His face paled. His hand still held the order; but

his eyes stared past it. Finally, he put it down on the table and tiptoed out of the room, cautiously as he had entered.

Vasili Nikolayevich looked after him in helpless regret.

The chief engineer was not in his office when Makarov came in. It was his custom to spend the greater part of the day in the shops, returning to his office only in the late afternoon.

Makarov went on to the director's office, and handed his appointment to the secretary in the waiting room. The secretary read it through and returned it, saying:

"The director won't see you."

"Go in and ask him."

"There's no need to."

"Why? Is he in conference?"

"No, he's alone. But he won't see you now."

This was unusual. In other works, it was customary for both director and chief engineer to receive a newly-appointed shop manager immediately upon his arrival.

As Makarov came down the stairs to the first-floor vestibule, he was greeted joyously by a lame old man in an enormous sheepskin coat, with sleeves so ridiculously long that the cuffs hung far below his fingertips. Only after a long

and searching look into the wrinkled, fire-scarred face did Makarov recognize grandfather Dmitryuk.

A moment later, Nikitenko came up, brisk and cheerful as ever, followed by Vasili Buroi, with his cap tilted jauntily over his singed forehead.

When they had shaken hands, Makarov asked what they were doing.

Dmitryuk waved a dangling sleeve disgustedly.

"They won't let me near any real work, Vasili Nikolayevich," he complained. "I'm too old, they say. A watchman—that's all I can be, to guard the potato bins. They took Shatilov on as a first helper, and offered to take Nikitenko and Buroi as second helpers. We come around every day, but it's no good. And not a one of our shop engineers is here. The rolling-mill and blast furnace men are all at work, on one job or another. but there's nothing for us. We've been waiting and waiting for you."

"I'm a melter, after all," Nikitenko said, in an injured tone. "And there you are—second helper! Why should I have to slip down two whole rungs?"

Makarov smiled. Nikitenko looked more injured still.

"I've been chief engineer," Makarov said.

"Will you tell me I ought to refuse to work as shop manager?"

Nikitenko did not answer.

"Look here, then, friends. This is no time for idling," Makarov went on reproachfully. "You go straight to the personnel department and take jobs in No. 2 open-hearth shop. Take whatever jobs you're offered. When I take over, I'll look into it. I don't promise anything much. Promotion will depend on work. If you do better than the local workers, I'll move you up. If you do worse—well, don't blame me. Is that clear?"

"It's fair enough," Buroi agreed. "You can't throw the local people out to make room for us. We can understand that. And you're right—it's a shame to hang around doing nothing."

"It's a shame, true enough," said Nikitenko. "Vasya, here, hung around in a queue to buy a mug of beer, a while ago, and now he's gone soft. Conscience? Or simply frost?"

This was pure provocation; but, inured by long usage to Nikitenko's biting tongue, Buroi took no offence.

Dmitryuk stood silently listening, dejected as before.

"You just wait a day or two, grandad," Makarov told him cheerily. "I'll have to put

in a special request to have you taken on. And in the meantime, if you're lonely, why not go around and visit your grandson?"

Entering the open-hearth building, Vasili Niko-
layevich paused for a while, just inside the
door, to get a general view. Having worked
some time at Makeyevka, he found nothing re-
markable in the tremendous height of the building,
in the dimensions of the giant furnaces, in the
enormous charging machines, massive and swift as
locomotives. But there had been only six furnaces
at Makeyevka, and here there were thirteen,
stretched out over a good five hundred metres.
Nowhere in the South had Makarov witnessed
such an impressive scene. There was another
difference, however, which soon caught his eye.
The Southern shops had been more orderly. Moving
behind the furnaces to glance into the teeming
bay, he found heaps of rubbish and slag lying
about on the charging level.

Had it always been so, or was this a recent
development? If recent, the trouble could be
cured with comparative ease; if long-established,
its cure would require considerable effort. Makar-
ov knew by experience how difficult it is to
root up settled habits. An old shop may be de-
molished, and a new one built; but the workers,

as a rule, will tend to bring with them into the new shop the traditions of the old.

No. 2 shop began with the seventh furnace. Here Makarov was much more favourably impressed, for Grigoryev had trained his workers to keep the charging level scrupulously clean. But the shop was not working as well as No. 1.

Grigoryev was nowhere to be seen. In his heart, Makarov was glad of this, as it enabled him to look the furnaces over without formality. The melters answered his questions willingly. They were accustomed to new faces. Many production engineers from the South, arriving at the works, had been appointed to administrative posts; and these engineers, drawn by an unconquerable loneliness for the molten metal, were frequent visitors in the different shops.

Furnaces 7, 8 and 9 were running hot. No. 10 was cooler, and the remaining three were cold. This Makarov saw at once, without even glancing in at the peepholes, by the dull pink of the reflection on the plates of the charging level.

"Why do you keep the gas so low?" he asked the melter at No. 13.

"Try and keep it high!" the melter answered scornfully. "The valve is open to the

limit. There's not enough gas to be had. We're on short rations."

Makarov looked into the furnace. The gas was coming through the port very sluggishly. Wavering and diffuse, the flame hung laxly in the working chamber.

Turning to the bulletin boards, Makarov began to study the time figures posted for the different furnaces. His brows knit gloomily. Beginning with No. 10, and in increasing measure for each succeeding furnace, the figures indicated impermissibly protracted heats. Until this moment, turning over in his mind the possibilities for increasing output, Makarov had thought of beginning with organizational measures, with a mobilization of forces, which might at once yield extra hundreds of tons of steel. "It is sometimes only a little thing that requires doing," Kaganovich had once said, "to clear the way for big results." And Makarov, deeply impressed, had made it a point, in all his further undertakings, to seek first of all those crucial "little" things on which so much depended. Here, however, he found himself confronted from the very outset with a technological problem of the gravest character: an insufficiency of coke gas for the needs of the works. Yes, Grigoryev had had a difficult task on his hands.

A million tons of steel! Makarov had realized at once what difficulties such a figure must involve. Still, abstractly considered in the office of the People's Commissar, the task had seemed simpler than he now found it at close hand.

Leaving the shop, he set out for the coking plant, the location of which he had noticed from the hilltop that morning.

The Donbas works Makarov had left behind was an old one, built by a stock company in tsarist days. Its designers had had in view, not convenience or efficiency, but the stockholders' dividends. Later, of course, many new shops had been added, many old ones rebuilt; yet the result stood no comparison with this gigantic new works, born of the first five-year plans. What magnificent space, what expedient layout! Between the shop buildings, low fences of iron grillwork set off wide, tree-dotted lawns. Snow-covered mounds marked the outlines of summer flower beds. "A works and a park, in one," Makarov reflected, imagining the grounds as they would appear after a few more years, when the trees had had time to grow.

What he found at the coking plant was not encouraging. Though work was in process on a new battery of ovens, it was not yet far enough advanced to promise early relief.

"We'll be on short rations for a long time yet," Makarov told himself glumly. His spirits fell; but this, he knew, would pass. It was his habit, when such moods began, to "close" his mind to the source of trouble, occupying himself with other problems and, above all, avoiding any betrayal of his feelings to others. Now, too, determined to think of other things, he turned in the direction of the rolling mill shops, rather than return to the furnaces.

"If they could only take, say, Krainev and me—stir us up together, and divide the result in two," he mused. "That would make a pair of good engineers. His fervour, and my self-control—there'd be just the right amount of each to fit out the two of us properly.... Wish I knew what's become of Sergei. Is he alive?"

From Krainev, his mind turned to Vadim.

The boy never spoke of his vanished playmate, never asked for Victor's toys to play with. He seemed to sense the unspoken agreement which kept the dead child's name from the Makarovs' lips. On first meeting, Makarov and Elena had wept together, silently. And since that time neither had spoken of their loss. All that had once been Victor's lay apart, shut up in a little black suitcase—treasured relics.

At one of the blooming mills, Vasili Nikola-

yevich stood for some time, watching the proceedings. Instead of rolling the usual square billets for succeeding mills, the blooming was flattening a big, seven-ton ingot into plate.

"Armour!" flashed through his mind. "So that's what they're doing! A new idea."

To get a better view of the work, he mounted the stairs to the bridge leading to the operator's cab. On the bridge stood a short, sandy-haired man in horn-rimmed spectacles, his eyes fixed on the watch he held in his hand.

Completing some observation, the sandy-haired man looked up and asked Makarov, none too cordially:

"What are you doing here?"

Makarov explained that he was waiting to see the chief engineer, and, in the meantime, had decided to take a look about the works.

"Your pass," the sandy-haired man demanded.

When he had examined the printed slip, with the works seal at the bottom, he said briefly, returning it to Makarov:

"You'll find the chief engineer in his office after five o'clock."

And without another word, he returned to his observations.

"Time studying?" wondered Vasili Nikolayevich, glancing back as he left the shop. The man

made an unimpressive figure, in his shabby coat, with stains on the shoulders left by dripping oil. "No, hardly that. He's too old. Someone from the engineering department, I suppose."

In the next shop, round bars were being rolled.

"Shells, for the front," Makarov decided, smiling as he watched the big workpiece glide swiftly, smoothly out from one set of rolls, and into another. There were no workers in sight, except for two young girls—one in a bright kerchief, the other in a jauntily tilted red beret—in the operating booth, at the controls.

The finishing bay of No. 2 blooming mill shop was a large building, equipped with numerous cranes. Here a tall man came hurrying up to Makarov, and embraced him heartily. It was Nechayev. In the South, Makarov and Nechayev had felt no particular liking for one another; but here—here they met as close friends.

"What are you doing?" Makarov asked.

"Manager of the finishing bay," Nechayev answered, with evident satisfaction.

Makarov stared blankly. This was a grave demotion for such a first-class rolling mill engineer as Nechayev had been counted in the Donbas. Why was he so pleased?

"There's nothing to be so surprised about,"

Nechayev said. "There's lots of us here, from the South. They can't put us all in charge of shops. I've been lucky, really. None of the shop managers have been placed higher than shift engineers. This works—it's never had such an influx of qualified men, yet it's giving them anything but a cordial welcome. Especially the director. You can't say a word to him. He visits the shops every day. Reprimands you over his shoulder and leaves, without listening to what you have to say. It's a big works, you know, and if you stop to talk you won't get around to all the shops. But the chief engineer, Mokshin—there's a man I respect. He goes about things differently. Asks about everything, when he comes around, and he's always sure to give you some good advice. See those?" Nechayev pointed to a moving train. The cars were thick-walled, fitted with detachable roofs. "That's his idea. They used to cool the armour plate before they sent it on to the heat treatment shop, and out there they'd have to heat it up again. Then the chief engineer proposed these cars, and now the armour plate goes off red-hot, with no delays for cooling and re-heating."

They talked on for a while, but only about work. Knowing of Makarov's loss, Nechayev feared to mention family affairs.

At five o'clock sharp, Vasili Nikolayevich

entered the chief engineer's waiting room. He was shown into the office at once.

Behind the desk sat the sandy-haired man he had met on the blooming mill bridge that morning.

Rising as Makarov came in, the chief engineer shook his hand heartily and, in a pleasant bass, asked him to be seated.

“I must beg your pardon,” he went on, smiling, “for my lack of attention to you this morning. I was counting seconds; and I had no seconds to spare. We don't get much production out of our improvised armour rolling mill. But we'll be starting your mill soon, and then, of course, things will go better.”

“Soon? Why, it just arrived not long ago—not over three weeks.”

“Is that what you call just arrived? Three weeks is a very long time. in war. We started work on the building for your mill while you were still using it.”

Indeed, as Makarov now recalled, the People's Commissar had had the drawings of the armour-plate mill sent East, by special messenger, some time before the works ceased operation.

“The mill is up on its foundation already,” the chief engineer went on. “We're mounting the auxiliary equipment now, and finishing up the building at the same time. And you say—just

arrived!" He glanced across the desk reprov-
ingly.

Then, picking up Makarov's appointment, he studied it in silence for a moment or two.

"This is rather unexpected," he admitted frankly, looking up again. "Grigoryev is a capable manager, and he was always well thought of at the People's Commissariat. True, he doesn't fly high. An empiricist. His shop stopped advancing long before the war, and even now he's marking time. Things are better in No. 1 shop. The manager there feels that study, for an engineer, should end only in the grave. He studies himself, and teaches others. Result: he's constantly progressing, and so are his subordinates."

"With the gas situation as it is today, it won't be an easy job to increase output," Makarov remarked.

"Don't give up before you try. There will be more gas, and soon," Mokshin said firmly.

Where will it come from? The new coke battery won't be ready for a long time to come."

"So you've been out there already, too? Inspecting the rear? Well, the gas situation will improve. You can take my word for that."

And Mokshin got up, to take Makarov's appointment to the director.

Rotov was still shut up in his office, receiving no one. Scanning the appointment with evident displeasure, he said:

"Tell him there's no hurry about it. I'm going to telephone the People's Commissar."

"Do you think that will change anything?"

"No," Rotov admitted. "The order won't be rescinded. But I want the People's Commissar to understand that I don't like appointments made over my head. I answer for the works, and I appoint my managers."

"I can't understand your attitude," Mokshin said coldly. "Here we have first-class engineers coming into the works, men that know their jobs, many of them, better than our old personnel. And what do we do with them? Take Nechayev, for instance. . . ."

"Your vaunted Nechayev! I'll send him flying out of the finishing bay, too." put in Rotov sharply, turning his face away. "Big people coming to the works!" He laughed mirthlessly. "They come, and they'll go. They're birds of passage, sheltering here from the storm of war. When the storm ends, they'll fly South again, like the cranes. And whom are you and I to work with when they leave? The little people again? Try and appoint Grigoryev to his old job then. Will he take it? No! There's such a thing as pride. And we'll be left

with no one—big or little. We have to keep our own forces intact. They grew up here, and they won't be lured South by sunshine or fruits. Little, maybe, but our own. With them, at any rate, you know the worth and the abilities of each, know where and when to push to get results."

"I don't agree with you," rumbled Mokshin. "Absolutely not. The war may drag out...."

Rotov sprang to his feet. How unlike they were: the towering director, inclining to corpulence of late, and the puny, narrow-shouldered chief engineer.

"How long do you think the war will last—five years?" Rotov demanded. "A nice mood for a man in a job like yours!"

"The war may drag out," Mokshin repeated, taking no notice of the director's sarcasm. "And it's our duty to make proper use of every man we have, to the full extent of his abilities and knowledge. Take Nechayev. He comes from a works that had the same type of equipment as we have here, and he knows the work just as well as either of our blooming mill managers."

"Yet he's made a mess of his job. What's the good of his knowledge, if he can't manage to get things done? As to the new shop manager, well and good. Only have him wait a day or two be-

fore taking over. I must take care of Grigoryev first. I'll appoint him chief steel metallurgist. That will satisfy him, and the People's Commissar will understand."

"You're forgetting one thing," said Mokshin crisply. "I answer for the works equally with you --no, to a greater degree than you. To a greater degree. It's the chief engineer who answers for engineering personnel. I shall write to the People's Commissar this very day about your attitude to our new people."

Turning unhurriedly, he left the room.

Often, as today, leaving the director's office, Mokshin carried in his heart a bitter aftertaste. But he kept his feelings under strict control. Only once, in the year they had worked together, had Mokshin's temper broken bounds: when the director, without so much as a word to him, countermanded his order for the cleaning of the gas line. Rushing into the director's office, where a number of shop managers had gathered for some conference, he had demanded loudly:

"Am I chief engineer at this works?"

"What's that?" Rotov had asked amazedly.

"I'm asking you: am I chief engineer?"

"Yes, you're chief engineer."

"Well, if I am, I'd thank you not to meddle in my affairs."

And, lest his anger carry him too far, he had hurried out.

Since that incident, things had been a little easier. Still, Mokshin was compelled to wage a constant offensive, to fight for his views, to argue over every question. He could never make up his mind what quality prevailed in Rotov: will, or obstinacy.

"What could have spoiled the man so rapidly?" Mokshin wondered, as he walked down the corridor to his own office. "Can it be the works achievements? Not only the works, of course. Actually, he heads the whole town as well. Everything the town can boast comes from the works. The streetcars are run by a special works department, the pavements laid by the works improvement department, the parks and boulevards planted by the greenery department. Even the chairman of the town Soviet comes around to ask, rather than demand."

To Makarov, waiting in his office, Mokshin said:

"The director suggests that you rest a day or two. Are you settled comfortably? Has your family arrived?"

"Yes, my family's here," Vasili Nikolayevich answered slowly, sensing, from Mokshin's tone, that his appointment in Grigoryev's place had been badly received.

"That's splendid," said Mokshin. "Myself, I was here alone, the first six months. My wife didn't want to leave Sverdlovsk. We were born there, you see, both of us. It's no fun when your head is here, and your heart out there. You just feel split in two."

He smiled, a pleasant smile.

Makarov got up.

"If I'm not needed here, I don't have to stay," he said, with his habitual frankness.

"You're badly needed," Mokshin returned, suddenly severe. "And you're going to work with us."

CHAPTER THIRTY

Vadim was improving rapidly. His cheeks had rounded out, and the fresh colour was returning. Looking into Elena's wan, tortured face, Makarov felt that it was she, and not the child, who was ill. Incurably ill.

Two days passed, yet Makarov was not summoned to the works. Elena began to worry, and again, for the hundredth time. Vasili Nikolayevich cursed himself for his habit of telling her all his doubts and troubles.

Towards evening, the front doorbell rang. A moment later, the Makarovs' door was opened slightly, and a face peeped warily in: Dmitryuk.

"Vasili Nikolayevich," the old man asked, "have you taken the shop over yet?"

"No, not yet."

"In that case, I can still come visiting."

And Dmitryuk stepped into the room. Vadim cried out in joyous greeting. It was a long time since he had seen his beloved Grandfather Frost. A bulging pocket caught the child's eye at once, and he stared shamelessly until Dmitryuk dipped a hand into the pocket and produced an apple.

"Why only in that case, granddad?" asked Vasili Nikolayevich. "You'll always be welcome here, whether I'm working or not."

"It's not the same thing," Dmitryuk returned, bending to hand the apple to the child. "It's sort of awkward, paying visits to your manager. People might think the old man's trying to get more than is coming to him."

"Foolishness. We're from the same town, the same works. And besides, Vadim here makes us the next thing to relatives."

Again the tears rose to Elena's eyes. It was Dmitryuk who had laid the brickwork to reinforce the little mound that marked her dead boy's grave. How skilfully he had performed his melancholy task, how gently.

The old man began some childish game with Vadim. The boy laughed so infectiously that even

Elena could not but join in. And Makarov felt an infinite gratitude to Dmitryuk for his wife's first smile.

There was a tap at the door, and Grigoryev came in. Noticing a stranger in the room, he hesitated for a moment; but the old man's good-natured smile seemed to reassure him.

"I hope you'll forgive me, Vasili Nikolayevich," he began, accepting the proffered chair, "for the way I behaved the other day. You see, it wasn't an easy bit of news for me. I'm feeling better now, but that first night. I must admit, I lay awake till morning, thinking. And now I've come to ask you this: would you object if I stayed on in the shop as your assistant?"

Somewhat taken aback, Makarov asked:

"Why, what objection could I have?"

"Not everyone in your position would agree. You have to know a person, have faith in him, to do a thing like that. We're all human. A demoted manager may be only too pleased if things don't improve under his successor. It's not nice, but—well, it's understandable. A man wants to seem in the right, if only to himself."

Makarov nodded.

"I don't want you to think I have no other choice," Grigoryev continued. "The director tried

today to talk me into the job of chief steel metallurgist. I refused downright. I'm used to working in the shop. I suppose you understand."

"Very much so."

"Well, there it is, then. If you can trust me, let's try and pull together."

He held out his hand, and Makarov pressed it heartily.

Dmitryuk had been playing with the child all this time, seeming hardly to notice the conversation. When Grigoryev had gone, however, the old man turned away from the crib and pulled up a chair beside Makarov.

"That sort of thing seldom turns out well," he said, shaking his head dubiously. "It's a big sort of soul a man must have, to work honestly in such a situation."

"Don't you worry, grandad," Makarov returned. "It will work out all right. People have bigger souls today than when you were young. And even little souls are growing big in this war."

Vasili Nikolayevich was never to regret his decision. At first, however, he did not find things easy. Obedient to habit, the steelmen came only to Grigoryev for instructions and advice. The work swung on independently of Makarov, and for some time he had the feeling that, should he suddenly leave, nothing would be changed by

his departure, just as nothing had been changed by his arrival. Output remained at its former level.

With daily increasing clarity, Makarov realized that not all in the shop was as it should be.

After a heat, the gas would be turned off, and the bottom cooled, while the taphole was being plugged. This was done to prevent the remnants of metal and slag from getting into the plug and "freezing" the hole; but it involved a grave drop in temperature.

"The tapholes ought to be plugged with the gas on," Makarov said one day.

Grigoryev shrugged.

"Yes," he replied, "but our crews don't know the system, and there's no one to teach them. It's a risky method."

"All open-hearth work is risky. You risked yourself, in Sayle's day, loading your cranes twenty-five per cent above rated capacity. And if there's no one to show how it's done, I can demonstrate myself."

When the shift ended, all the free crews assembled behind one of the furnaces, where the steel was being tapped. Makarov borrowed the first helper's cap, with blue glasses attached, and got into a tarpaulin apron and mitts. Skilfully,

if somewhat nervously—for it was many years since he had last done this work—he plugged the taphole, with the gas on.

Grigoryev, watching the steelmen's attentive faces, regretted, for the first time in his life, that he had never worked as a rank-and-filer at the furnaces.

The work done, Makarov threw off his mitts and apron and invited his audience into the record room.

"Now you've seen how it's done," he said, when the workers had settled down on chairs and benches.

"Yes, we've seen it," returned one of the melters. "And we've also seen furnaces stand idle for three hours and four, when the helper muffs the job and freezes the hole."

"And we've seen the metal burst through the taphole, too," added Permyakov, another melter—a youthful-looking man for his fifty years, though a faint spattering of grey showed at his temples. "It's easy enough to demonstrate, when you know how. But how are you going to teach people to work it? Take a lazy, clumsy lout like this Lapenko of mine"—he pointed to an ill-built, flabby-cheeked young fellow—"and just you try to teach him. Why, he lumbers along just like an elephant. What you need here is speed,

and skill, and the devil himself can't teach Lapenko that. It's the way he was born."

"Haven't you got anyone a little nimbler in your crew?" Makarov asked, smiling involuntarily.

"There's Ivan Smirnov, of course—my second helper. He could probably do it. Quick as lightning, that lad."

"Well, then, make Ivan first helper."

"What do you mean?" demanded Lapenko, with a vehemence hardly to be expected in one of his slothful disposition. "I've been working at the furnace four years, and Ivan's only been here two. Why should he be put ahead of me?"

Makarov's eyes flashed.

"Hold on, hold on, comrades," he exclaimed. "What's the system here? Who gets promoted first—the man that's been working longest, or the man that does the work best?"

"The one that's been working longest, of course," Permyakov replied for all.

"It just makes no difference how you try," Ivan said hotly. His lively eyes fixed almost imploringly on Makarov. "Until the first helper leaves, or gets in trouble, you've no chance to get ahead. The only time you can do some real work is on his day off, or when he's on vacation."

"Is that correct?" Makarov asked, turning to Grigoryev.

"Ycs, of course. That's always been the tradition in open-hearth shops. How else can it be? A man works, say, ten years. How can you suddenly take him off and put someone else in his place? On what grounds?"

"Our young workers will never progress that way."

"They're not progressing, comrade manager," came a clear, firm voice from the far corner. "As Comsomol secretary, I can tell you that. They're not progressing at all."

"Comrade Lapenko!" Makarov said. "Would you undertake to plug the taphole with the gas on?"

Lapenko's ingenuous, light-lashed eyes turned to him bewilderedly. A devil of a man, this new manager—only working two weeks, and knew a fellow by name already! Unhurriedly, he answered:

"Well, no. I wouldn't."

"And you, Comrade Smirnov?"

"I do it, when the melter lets me. Only that's not often."

"Right?" Makarov asked Permyakov.

"He can do it."

"Will you take him as first helper?"

The melter hesitated, reluctant to offend Lapenko.

"He's all right. He can do the job," he said finally.

"Then, beginning tomorrow, Ivan will be first helper. Lapenko can watch and learn. Only—don't let us down, Smirnov. I'll have a look at your work. If you do well, I'll appoint you instructor for the shop. You'll move around from furnace to furnace, teaching the other helpers. A sort of Stakhanovite school."

"I won't let you down, comrade manager," cried Ivan, with glowing eyes.

But Permyakov demanded heatedly:

"What is this, anyway? Here I've been working thirty years at the furnaces—and tomorrow, maybe, you'll be shifting me around too?"

Watching Permyakov at work, Makarov had been deeply impressed by the elderly melter's unhurried efficiency at the furnace, by the quiet discipline he maintained among his helpers.

"Quite possibly," he replied composedly. "In fact, there can hardly be any doubt about it. There are two or three foremen I've noticed who don't do their jobs as well as they should. Why shouldn't they step aside and make room for you?"

Try as he might, Permyakov could not suppress a smile.

Makarov went out, with Grigoryev, onto the charging level. For some time they stood silently at the rail, watching the teeming of the heat just tapped.

"There's only one thing I ask," Grigoryev said, as the last mould was being filled. "Do the shifting yourself."

"So that if anyone's offended, it won't be at you?" asked Makarov ironically.

"No. It's simply that I don't agree with you. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I don't agree. And I can't agree about the tapholes, either."

"Very well. I'll do the shifting. You will agree later on. And as to the tapholes—why, this method saves twenty to thirty minutes on every heat. True, it may happen that things will go wrong once in a while, at first, and we'll lose a little time. But the final gain will make it up many times over."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

There is one peculiarity about the work of the steel melter which distinguishes him sharply from workers of many other trades. Turner, driller, milling machine operator—each has his individual, clearly defined task; each knows that

the results of his labour will depend, first and foremost, on his own ability and effort. But a heat of steel in an open-hearth furnace is a different thing. Here the results depend on the joint labour of an entire collective. Started in one shift, a heat may continue into the next—may even drag into the third. An hour's negligence in the initial stages may condemn all the ensuing work to failure. Five minutes' delay in tapping may reduce to waste all the preceding labour. A melter worthy of the name must have a highly developed feeling of comradeship; must be ready, if need be, to sacrifice his personal interests to the interests of the collective.

Should a heat be spoiled, or unduly protracted, considerable expenditure of time and effort is often required to determine who, concretely, is to blame.

A rapid redistribution of forces, in conformity with skill and ability—such was the first task Makarov set himself.

In this, Grigoryev could be of little help. To him, the chief criterion in placing any worker was the number of years that worker had spent at the furnaces. Makarov approached the question from an entirely different angle. High-speed melters, record setters, he knew, often came from the ranks of the youth.

In ordinary conditions, Makarov would have gone about his changes gradually, after a patient study of his personnel in the process of work. Now, however, there was no time to spare. Hence, he determined to subject the melters to a test of a special order. In place of the ordinary shifts, the work of the furnace crews was organized temporarily on a heat-to-heat system, under which the melter who started a heat remained in charge until it had been tapped. This method left no room for the shifting of blame.

Most of the workers welcomed this idea. Those, however, who had been accustomed to shelter behind others' backs, attempted to protest.

"And suppose the heat drags out for sixteen hours?" one of them asked, at the meeting called to discuss the new system of work. "Does that mean the whole crew has to stay two shifts on end?"

"Why stay two shifts?" Makarov returned, smiling. "What's to prevent you from putting your heat through in ten hours? Once the heat is tapped, your work is done, and you're free to go home."

Melter Permyakov, always calm and majestic—almost statuesque—on the charging level, never

losing his composure at delays in the work, suddenly began to display a swift agility that made him seem a good twenty years younger.

"How the old man has changed!" the chief engineer remarked to Grigoryev, hearing the melter shout furiously at his assistants because of some slight delay. "And incidentally, what's he doing in this shift?"

"Yes, he's beginning to put on speed," Grigoryev replied. "His trump card always used to be, thirty years at the furnaces. Now a different trump is demanded."

And, with evident enjoyment, he went on to describe Makarov's innovations.

"So the new manager's not so bad, after all?" asked Mokshin, noting with satisfaction the complete absence of envy or malice in Grigoryev's tone.

"He's splendid. Knows the work from every angle—furnace hand to chief engineer."

Having completed a heat, nowadays, Permyakov could no longer rest quietly at home. After a few hours of sleep he would return to the shop to watch, with jealous interest, the work of the other melters. On the melters' days off, the furnaces would be run by their first helpers. And one day, studying the new bulletin board on which each melter's name was followed by figures

for duration of heats and amount of steel produced, Permyakov pondered lengthily on his own showing as compared with Ivan Smirnov's.

"Am I getting old?" he muttered to himself. "No! I'll show them yet what I can do!"

That day, Shatilov was running his first heat in the Comsomol furnace. He arrived early, before the preceding heat had been tapped. When he began to prepare the furnace, working together with his crew, Permyakov watched with rising admiration. The young melter would dash up to the furnace door with his scoop as though he intended to leap inside. Poised at the very sill, blackly outlined against the flame, his fire-scarred face turned away from the blaze, he would swing his scoop swiftly and skilfully, casting its burden in the required direction. And again he would be off, outstripping his assistants, calling on them to overtake him. He began immediately after the tapping of the preceding heat, before the hole had been plugged. Only after the furnace was prepared did he run to the back wall, to give his helper a hand at the hole.

This was something Permyakov had never before seen done.

"A full ten minutes gained," he said to himself, at once grieved at his former ignorance of

this method and pleased that he had now discovered it.

He stood on, watching the proceedings at the furnace. Grigoryev, finding him there, asked:

"Well, Permyakov—learning from others, eh?"

"Live and learn," the melter answered despondently. "And if I keep on a hundred years, I'll still know nothing!"

"It's never too late to learn or to love," said Grigoryev, smiling. "As far as loving's concerned, you certainly made the best of your young days. But as far as learning's concerned, I'm afraid you and I missed out badly, both of us."

Shatilov came running up to them.

"Comrade Grigoryev!" he pleaded. "If we could have more gas! Just a little more! The furnace simply begs for it."

"More gas!" Grigoryev repeated to himself.

Gas was the shop's great problem. In this respect, No. 1 shop was far better situated. Coming first on the line, it took all the gas it needed; and very little was left for the furnaces in No. 2, not to speak of the other shops.

"Gas!" begged melters, rollers, heat process workers.

"Gas!" demanded the shop managers.

Gas was discussed at meetings, rallies, shop

and works reports. But the volume of gas did not increase.

Grigoryev shrugged helplessly.

When the limestone and ore were in, Shatilov had the charging machine operator attach a big, hooked shovel to his ram and thrust it into the furnace, to even out the charge.

This was too much for Permyakov.

"You're just wasting time, doing that," he whispered to Shatilov. "Wasting time, and cooling the furnace."

Shatilov glanced up at him, as though trying to tell whether this was mockery or serious advice.

"You try it, some day," he answered simply. "I find it helps. Or better still, stay around, if you will, and see how it goes. I'd be glad of your help. You see, I don't know these furnaces any too well yet."

His frankness won Permyakov.

"I'll stay," he decided. "The boy has interesting ideas. And perhaps I can help."

Before long, he was entirely carried away by the work.

Every minute or two, Shatilov would peer into the furnace, crooking his elbow over his face to protect it against the heat; for the burns received in rescuing the works draft files still made themselves felt. Watching the flame intent-

ly, he would react immediately to every change, running to the shutters—he did everything on the run!—to increase or decrease the flow of air according to the amount of gas coming in.

“No, I’ll never be able to keep pace with him,” Permyakov reflected sadly, watching Shatilov skip across a charging car that blocked his way. “My skipping days are over, and he has his whole life still ahead. How old is he, I wonder? Twenty-five? Yet he’s a melter already—and what a melter! Down South, they say, he was a foreman, even. It wasn’t by vodka bribes he got his learning, the way we did in my day.”

And Permyakov recalled the first foreman under whom he had worked. Over thirty years had passed since that time; but not in thrice thirty years would Permyakov forget the amount of vodka he had had to bring that foreman to gain his first promotion: from ordinary unskilled labour to car pushing. Nobody had ever explained anything, in those days. Nobody had ever shown how things were done. A worker might live his life through and never learn the things that were now taught the youth in a year or two at the trade and factory schools. Foremen had carried their secrets with them to the grave. Yet this youngster—again Permyakov turned to

watch Shatilov—this youngster made no secret of anything he knew; for nothing had been kept a secret from him.

After the hot metal had been added, Shatilov did not leave the peepholes for an instant. Like a sentry, he paced up and down, up and down, from the first to the fifth and back to the first again: twenty steps each way.

"He's a little green. Looks into the furnace too often," thought Permyakov.

After glancing in himself, however, he understood Shatilov's uneasiness. Even through the blue glass, the furnace roof looked white. It seemed on the very verge of fusion.

"Have a care, young fellow," he muttered, shaking his head. "There's trouble near."

But the young fellow was showing care enough. Noting a danger spot, he would dash headlong to the controls; and then Permyakov would look in at the peephole, starting nervously when it seemed to him that the roof was damaged.

All went well, however. Shatilov cooled each overheated section before any damage could be done.

By the middle of the heat, Permyakov was as busy as Shatilov, keeping a vigilant eye on the furnace roof and shouting at the helpers now

and then, as though he, Permyakov, were in charge of the heat.

Shatilov worked in unremitting haste, and demanded the same haste of all concerned—subordinates and superiors alike.

When the shift foreman failed to appear on time, Shatilov had the ore charged without waiting for permission. When the foreman hurried up, protesting, Shatilov declared firmly:

"We can't stand around waiting. We've no time to spare. This is a high-speed heat. And you needn't worry. I've made really complex steel—armour plate for tanks. This shell steel—why, a furnace helper could do it, with his eyes closed, down in our works."

Long before the heat was ready for tapping, Shatilov began to worry the shift engineer, demanding that materials be brought up for the next heat.

"A different school of work, entirely different," Permyakov told himself. "In the old days, every melter was a lone wolf. They'd charge the furnace on a cold bottom, sometimes, and you'd waste a whole shift just trying to melt the stuff!"

The heat bettered Permyakov's last record by a full twenty minutes. The elderly melter was not a little disturbed; yet, strangely enough,

there was no hint of envy in his alarm. He realized that Shatilov had no selfish secrets in his work. His success was due to training and initiative, to an inexhaustible eagerness for active effort, to his skill in estimating roof temperature and in keeping it always at the very maximum. This required considerable daring, and constant strained attention. Permyakov knew what that took out of a man.

Walking home, Permyakov tasted in anticipation the bitterness of defeat in the contest thus begun. The helper assigned him in place of Ivan Smirnov had not yet learned to plug the taphole with the gas on.

"Stay around and see how it goes. I'd be glad of your help," he muttered, repeating Shatilov's words. "And who's to help me, I'd like to know?"

When he entered the shop for his next heat, however, to his great surprise and pleasure, he found Shatilov waiting for him.

"I've come to help. I'll plug it up with the gas on," the young man whispered, smiling—and immediately grimaced with pain, for the skin about his mouth was still puckered and sensitive. A load fell from Permyakov's heart.

Shatilov did not leave until the heat had been tapped. It bettered his own record by

another five minutes. Permyakov, who had hoped for no more than a tie, was a little embarrassed by this victory. His young "rival," however, was unfeignedly pleased.

"There!" he said. "I shaved off twenty minutes, and you shaved off another five. Now, perhaps, someone else will cut off twenty or thirty more—and that will make an hour, almost, off every melt. Why, that would mean an extra twenty tons of shells—a full carload!"

They left the works together, Shatilov excited and happy, Permyakov almost too tired to walk—his only tribute to age.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Pyrin became very useful to the underground. Applying to the municipal board, he received permission to set up a private watch repairing establishment, and for this purpose to occupy a little house, deserted by its owners, in one of the quiet streets on the outskirts of the town. Serdyuk was officially registered as Pyrin's agent for the purchase of watch parts and springs, thus receiving legal status as a private employee. In the living quarters behind the shop, the members of the underground could report to their

commander in comparative safety. Suspicion could hardly attach to anyone entering the shop with a watch or clock in need of repairs; and, in this remote neighbourhood, genuine clients very rarely disturbed the watchmaker.

Gradually, the work of the underground group was systematized.

Pyotr Prasolov hired on at the works, to which Serdyuk had begun to devote particular attention. At the mines around the town, Soviet patriots prevented the Germans from bringing up a single ton of coal. Cages and pumps would be put out of commission as soon as they were repaired, and at one of the mines the headframe was blown up. Here, as in most parts of the Donbas, the Hitlerites were compelled to fall back on coal shipped from Germany. On the railway, the underground workers were more active still, blowing up munitions trains, throwing sand into axle boxes, and sabotaging in the locomotive repair shops, so that "restored" engines would halt powerlessly after a few kilometres' run. But at the works there was no sign of such activity. Evidently, the comrade entrusted with this task had either been caught before he could accomplish anything, or lost his nerve and decided to bide his time. In view of this, Serdyuk felt himself obliged, in addition to his

basic assignment, to assume leadership of the works underground. Activities had already begun. In the open-hearth shop, Sasha conducted weekly readings of the *Donetsky Vestnik*, as marked for him by Serdyuk. In the machine shop, where Prasolov quickly recruited a number of helpers, similar readings were organized by a young fitter, Semyon Vorobyov.

Valya Teplova did not go to work anywhere. To secure herself against mobilization, she had obtained from a local doctor a certificate that she was ill with tuberculosis. Though untrue, this certificate was unlikely to be doubted—so thin and pale had Valya grown. Her principal duty lay in the regular issue of leaflets informing the population of developments at the front and calling for resistance to the invaders. Serdyuk, very seriously, called her his secretary for propaganda. One day, Serdyuk got hold of a ramshackle typewriter. It gave Pyrin a great deal of trouble, demanding almost daily repairs; but it made the work much easier. Sasha's friends no longer sat up nights to copy out the leaflets. They had only to distribute them.

Pavel Prasolov was also unemployed as yet. He would wander about the town and the market place all day, and every evening he would bring fresh news. Serdyuk was keeping him in re-

serve, for the time being. There was some danger about his situation, of course; but Serdyuk did not worry. Pavel could be depended on to get out of any predicament, be it a roundup on the market place or mobilization for work in Germany.

Maria Grevtsova, on the other hand, was a source of grave anxiety. To Maria's mind, the underground group was not justifying its existence. She wanted action, vigorous, uninterrupted, to avenge all the fascists' evil. Ignorant of much of the work that was being done, for Serdyuk told no one more than was absolutely necessary, she often complained to Pyrin:

"Our commander's getting lazy. Sitting back, doing nothing. He'll be safe enough, that way, but what's the good?"

Pyrin seldom spoke; but to Maria it seemed that he sympathized.

One day, passing in the vicinity of the town police headquarters, Maria met a former school-mate, a girl named Norina. Some years before, Grevtsova and Norina had been close friends; but they had soon drifted apart, Maria's romantic nature revolting at her friend's calculating practical sense. Originally drawing them to one another, as is often the case, the girls' utter dissimilarity of character had in the end set up a wall between them. Now, however,

Norina greeted Maria as effusively as in the days of their greatest intimacy. Learning that Maria was still unemployed, she advised her to go to work immediately.

"We have an opening at police headquarters, in the passport bureau," she confided, and added, in a whisper, "It's a paying job, Maria. Come and apply. Only you've got to hurry, or you'll miss the chance."

After a few moments' thought, Maria agreed.

Learning from Pavel that Maria had gone to work at police headquarters, Serdyuk was both puzzled and angry at this violation of the most elementary discipline. He ordered Pavel to send Maria to the shop; but the next day passed, and the next, and Maria did not come. Serdyuk's uneasiness grew steadily.

Then, at last, she appeared. Without a word, she laid down on the table several night passes, properly signed and stamped. This made things clearer.

"Thanks, of course," Serdyuk said, when he had looked the passes over. "But you seem to forget, Comrade Grevtsova"—when he was displeased, his manner always became extremely formal—"you seem to forget, Comrade Grevtsova, that you are a member of an underground group, and...."

"Of an idle underground group," put in Maria caustically.

"How can you know whether the group is idle or active?"

"I don't care," she persisted, looking up at him angrily. "In any case, I'm an idle member of the group, and I want to be active. If I can't be allowed to kill fascists, at least I can try to save the lives of our Soviet comrades. That's also worth sacrifice. You stay in the house here all the time, Andrei Vasilyevich. But if you went out more, and saw with your own eyes what those beasts are doing to our people, your patience wouldn't last."

Serdyuk was furious; but he kept his temper down.

"And what do you do at police headquarters?" he asked, abruptly changing the subject.

"Not much, so far," she admitted, flushing. "I work in the passport bureau. It's an interesting institution, this police of theirs. A place where everything conceivable is bought and sold: registration stamps on passports, releases from mobilization, even release from arrest. Prices vary, depending on the greed of the seller and the means of the buyer. My work will be useful to the group. I can keep you informed on everything they're doing, or planning to do."

"I suppose you haven't had a chance yet to find out how large a police force they're intending to set up?"

"I can tell you that exactly. Four hundred."

"Are you sure you're not mistaken, Maria? Four hundred is enormous, for a town like this."

"That's the figure they set. Only they'll never be able to recruit so many. So far, they have about a hundred."

"What sort of people do they pick?"

"What they like best are former kulaks, and men who've been in prison for counterrevolutionary activities. But they take on ordinary criminals too."

"What departments have they organized?"

"Three: criminal, political, and the passport bureau. The political department is run directly by the Gestapo, right across the street from the police. It's a dreadful place, that Gestapo building, Andrei Vasilyevich. Yesterday, one of their prisoners jumped out of a third-floor window. He couldn't stand the tortures." She shuddered. "And they let him lie there on the sidewalk, dead, all day."

"Still," Serdyuk put in, interrupting her story, "you should have consulted me before going to work. That was your duty as a member

of the underground. I had been planning to put you to better use: in the Gestapo, as an interpreter."

"I should have come to you, of course," Maria agreed. "But the thing turned up, and I had to answer on the spot, yes or no. So I thought it over quickly, and said yes."

Serdyuk was silent. Again Maria pressed her old complaint:

"It's hard to bear, Andrei Vasilyevich. People are doing things: wrecking trains, blowing up munitions dumps. And we?"

"And we, Maria, must destroy the vile cobweb that's been spun around the town," Serdyuk replied.

Cautiously, in general terms, he told her a little about the work their group had been assigned. Her dissatisfaction was somewhat allayed.

"Work carefully. Don't give yourself away," he said in parting. She nodded.

After this interview, Serdyuk's anxiety for Maria was redoubled. Her flaming hatred for the enemy, he feared, might burst all bonds of self-control.

What troubled Serdyuk above all else, however, was an oppressive uncertainty as to his proper course of action. Had he or had he not the right to involve the members of his group in

activities unconnected with the specific assignment he had received? Comrade Varyanov, whose name Kravchenko had shown Serdyuk on a slip of paper during their interview at the Town Committee, was not to be found at the indicated address; and Serdyuk felt himself cut off from all contact with the remaining underground. There was no one to whom he could turn for advice, or for assistance, should it be needed. He could act only as his own understanding, and the circumstances in the town, dictated.

Side by side with every new order posted by the German command, there would immediately appear an appeal to the population not to obey this order.

The first leaflets, spread over the town through an open-hearth furnace stack on November 7, had been signed, "T.C." These letters had stood simply for the words, "town Comsomol"; but people had interpreted them differently. "T.C."—what could that mean but the Bolshevik Town Committee? The leaflets had immediately won the confidence of the townsfolk; and from that time on Serdyuk had continued to address the population in the name of the Town Committee.

At times, the leaflets were couched in terms of direct command. Thus, when the German

Kommandantur ordered the population to turn in warm clothing for the German army, a leaflet appeared in which the Town Committee of the Bolshevik underground forbade the people to turn in warm clothing.

"Let the fascists freeze on our soil," the leaflet went on. "Let the winter winds warm their blood. That will help the Red Army rout the invaders."

After this leaflet, as Serdyuk learned from Teplova, Opauasenko, now completely reconciled with Sasha, told the boy:

"So our Soviet authority hasn't left the town. It's here with us. It gives us good advice. It appeals. And it commands. Well, then, whose orders am I going to obey? The German Kommandant's—may a hot ladle capsize on him!—or our own Town Committee's?"

One Sunday, Pyotr Prasolov came to Serdyuk at the watch repairing shop, clearly very much disturbed.

"Andrei Vasilyevich," he said, "a woman came to our house this morning, an elderly woman—over forty, I'd say. She says she's from the central staff of the partisan movement, and she wants to get in touch with you."

"This morning, you say? And now it's two o'clock," Serdyuk remarked, glancing at the array of alarm clocks on the sideboard.

"Well, I couldn't come straight, could I? I doubled around all over town, to make sure I wasn't followed."

"Did you question her thoroughly?"

"I did my best. She's certainly careful enough: found Grevtsova's house yesterday evening, but when she discovered Maria was working in the police she didn't risk talking to her. Then, today, she searched me out. She felt her ground at first, didn't come to the point till she was sure. She knows all our names, and what our assignment is. There's only one thing bothers me: she has no documents. Not a single one."

"That's just what reassures me," Serdyuk answered, getting hastily into his coat. "If she has no documents, it looks as if she's genuine. A spy would have plenty of papers—plenty and to spare. The Germans never work without a few forgeries. They're great hands at it."

Taking an alarm clock from the sideboard, Serdyuk went out. A few minutes later, Pyotr followed.

The messenger seemed to be dozing when Serdyuk came into the Prasolovs' living room; but she did not have to be wakened. At the sound of footsteps she sprang up at once, turning clear eyes, with no trace of drowsiness, on the newcomer.

"Leads a dangerous life," Serdyuk noted to himself. "But her face is calm. Genuinely calm."

Aloud, he said:

"I'm Serdyuk."

"Your passport," she demanded. Putting on a pair of iron-rimmed spectacles, she examined his document carefully, looking up twice to compare the photograph with its original.

"You look ten years younger, here," she said, as she returned the passport.

"Nothing surprising about that," he returned. "The photo was taken before all this began."

"Well, then, Andrei Vasilyevich," the messenger began, sitting down at the table. "I have no documents, and no written orders. I keep everything here"—and she pointed to her forehead. "Listen carefully. The Ukrainian Central Committee and the central staff of the partisan movement call upon you to prevent the Germans from starting the machine shop. Everything possible must be done towards that end."

"I'm working in that direction already, to the best of my ability," Serdyuk replied, brightening. It was very pleasant to hear that the instructions of the central staff coincided with his own plans.

"Well, now you must work in that direction still more energetically. The staff feels that the

best course would be to blow up the power station."

And in full detail, as though she herself had seen it, she explained to him all that she had learned from Kravchenko about the charge of ammonite bricked up in the cable channel under the generator.

"Where is the staff located?" Serdyuk asked.

She stiffened, and her eyes grew suddenly stern.

"You ought to know," she said, "that such questions are not asked, because they won't be answered."

Smiling, he replied:

"That's what I expected you would say."

"A test question?"

"A test question."

"Not bad."

"But tell me one thing," Serdyuk went on. "How does this assignment fit in with my general orders? Why can't it be done by the group assigned to the works?"

"You reason like anyone but an underground commander," she returned scornfully. "Though, I suppose, that's another test question."

"Exactly."

"The staff has no information as to any group existing at the works. Comrade Varyanov

—the comrade you were instructed to keep in touch with—was supposed to organize such a group. But he was shot by the Gestapo for carrying arms. Incidentally, do your comrades carry arms?"

"Why does that interest you?"

"You see, arms all too frequently serve to expose members of the underground, and very seldom help to save them. Take Varyanov. He was stopped accidentally, on some slight suspicion. But they found a revolver on him—and he was lost. Arms can only help you to sell your life dearly, and escape torture. Consequently, in the underground, the highest type of courage dictates that arms should be carried only during fulfilment of assignments in which they may be needed."

The last shade of mistrust faded from Serdyuk's eyes as he listened. When she had finished, he told her about his doubts and hesitations in the case of Krainev, Lobachov, and Pivovarov.

"Lobachov was an enemy," she said. "The preservation of the power station seems to have been his work. But as to Krainev, the whole thing is far from clear."

She was silent a while, thinking over what he had told her. Then she asked again:

"But what about arms? You haven't answered my question."

Serdyuk replied that he issued weapons only when they were required for the fulfilment of assignments.

"Very well. And now I want a report on what you've done so far," she said, in much the tone of a schoolmistress calling on a pupil to recite his lesson.

He told her all that his group had accomplished.

"Your further plans?" she asked.

Serdyuk hesitated.

"I'm not in the habit of reporting my plans until I've carried them out," he replied slowly.

"You'll have to change that habit now. The Central Committee and the partisan staff do more than simply assign tasks and demand account. They guide the work of the underground groups and organizations, prevent many errors, succeed even in organizing exchange of experience among the different groups. For example, I'm instructed to direct your special attention to persons arrested and then released by the Gestapo. As a rule, the Gestapo releases only such prisoners as agree to become spies and informers."

Dropping all further thought of reserve, Serdyuk explained his plans to her in full detail. She listened attentively, and when he had finished said:

"Excellent plans. But so far, Comrade Khrushchov says, you haven't accomplished very much. As yet, you're not living up to the name people have given you—that of the Town Committee. It's a name that carries weighty obligations. For a beginning, make yourself at least the works committee. Take charge of the works, and particularly the machine shop. Best of all, if possible, put the power station out of commission. Without power, no part of the works can operate. If you're short of helpers, get in touch with other groups." She named the leaders of three groups, and the addresses at which they could be found. **"The miners will also help you willingly. In peacetime, the miners give up the light of day in order to bring light to others. And today they are giving their lives to bring back life for others. They stop at no sacrifice in the underground struggle."**

Before leaving, the messenger made arrangements with Serdyuk for the place of future meetings—Pyrin's watch repairing shop—and for the password. She also gave him the name of a Soviet patriot working in the German employment bureau, who could be helpful in getting comrades into convenient jobs or in releasing them from mobilization.

When she got into her shabby coat and shawl, Serdyuk suddenly recognized her. This was the

woman who had come out of Kravchenko's office, that memorable day at the Town Committee.

"There's a messenger!" he thought admiringly, on his way home. "Why, she's a genuine instructor. And what an instructor! She might have been doing this work all her life! Well, so we haven't been forgotten. We have a staff, to help and instruct and demand. Our assignment has been enlarged. That means I was right, to extend the work as I did. And now the time has come to strike."

For the first time since the occupation of the town, his lips curved in a happy smile.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Sasha's reading of the *Donetsky Vestnik*, one dinner hour, was interrupted by a really extraordinary occurrence.

An officer in SD uniform entered the shop, followed by five soldiers and an interpreter. The workers got up.

"Which is Lyutov?" asked the interpreter.

"I'm Lyutov," the foreman cried. Hurrying up to the Germans, he snapped to attention before them.

The officer pointed silently. Two of the soldiers immediately seized Lyutov, twisted his arms

behind him, and slipped a pair of handcuffs onto his wrists, while the other three, with automatics at the ready, kept a close watch on the workers.

Then, closing in around their prisoner, the Germans marched him off. Lyutov's face and figure expressed the most grieved bewilderment. He could not understand what he had done to deserve such sudden disfavour.

"Good riddance to the bloody hound! The Gestapo, even, got sick and tired of him." Lutsenko commented, highly pleased. "Now we'll smoke our fill!" And, sitting down on some bricks, he began to roll a "horseleg" cigarette.

But smoking became even less possible than before; for Valsky now assumed personal charge of the crew. Though Lyutov had shouted and cursed, he had really feared the workers. Valsky knew no limit in his persecutions. The Germans had promised to return him the estate his father had once owned in the Oryol gubernia; and he spared no effort to demonstrate his devotion. He checked the progress of the work several times a day, appearing always where he was least to be expected: now from behind the ruins of the neighbouring furnace, now from the shelter of one of the charging level supports.

Every day, five or six workers would be deprived of bread as a result of his observations.

Not infrequently, Smakovsky visited the shop, meting out punishment to right and left. Geiss, too, when he looked in, would pick some scapegoat, as a lesson to the rest.

Life was a little easier for the workers assigned to repair the roof. They would scramble up in the morning, with a few pails of coke, fire their little stoves, and lie around all day, doing nothing.

Valsky was afraid to climb to the roof. Failing to hear the clatter of hammers overhead when he entered the shop, on the stroke of nine every morning, he would rage and squeal on the charging level, twisting his short pig neck in an effort to see what was going on.

Then the "work" on the roof would begin: an energetic clattering of hammers, heels, or, often, simply fists. Satisfied that all was well, Valsky would continue on his rounds.

Geiss eventually lost all patience with Valsky's eternal talcbearing.

"I can't throw them all into concentration camp," he told the overzealous "mcister" finally. "There has to be someone left to do the work."

Valsky went straight to von Wechter to complain. Geiss, he declared, was undermining all

authority. Geiss was playing the liberal with the Russian workers.

This time, he overreached.

What transpired between the works owner and the Sonderführer, no one knew. But after their interview Geiss came rushing into the shop, flushed, perspiring, furious, and shouted:

"Wo ist sonabitch Valskee?"

The workers shrugged ignorance.

"Valskee nicht meister. You to be meister."

And the German pointed at Opanasenko.

"Me? What sort of boss am I?" Opanasenko objected, shaking his head in vigorous negation.

"Silents! You to be boss!" yelled Geiss, with such insane fury that Opanasenko regretted Valsky's absence. It would have been good to see the German take it out of that lickspittle.

"Valskee kick out on the neck!" Geiss shouted in parting, and ran out of the shop.

The workers crowded around their new-baked shop manager, who was grumbling vexedly:

"Ugh! The devil take it all! Me--a boss under the Germans?"

Just then Valsky appeared from behind one of the furnaces. Suspecting nothing, he began to squeal as usual:

"Doing nothing again! I'll starve you yet! I'll have you all shot!"

There was an instant's silence. Sasha glanced eagerly from face to face, wondering how it would all end.

"Who do you think you're yelling at?" Opasencko demanded, with a sudden grim severity. "I'm the boss here now. Geiss said to drive you out with a kick in your backside. Come on, get going, you scum!" Bending, he seized a shovel.

Valsky ran for the door, stumbling over the scattered rubbish. Sasha hurled a piece of brick after him, but missed.

The new manager adopted the former laboratory room as his official headquarters. The laboratory window offered a clear view of the road by which Geiss and Smakovsky came to the shop. Hence, by keeping someone constantly on watch here, the crews could always be warned in good time when danger approached. Now, whenever the authorities arrived, the men would be hard at work; and both sides were satisfied.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Knowing the Sonderführer's violent temper and weighty fist, Valsky was afraid to show himself, not only at the works, but even in the street. At first the ill-starred "meister" tried to conceal his misfortunes from his wife; but in the end he was

obliged to confess that he had "lost his position." Time dragged drearily. Madame Valskaya, bewailing her fate, went daily to the market place to sell something of their household goods. Valsky stayed at home, meditating upon his troubles and seeking consolation in a pile of old family photographs. How they brought back the distant past, in all its poignant sweetness! There he stood, a little boy, beside an enormous flower bed, clinging to the hand of a majestic lady with a high coiffure—his mother. There, on paper yellowed with age, was his father, stout and well-groomed, photographed against a long lane of maples that led to a house adorned with numerous columns. And there was Valsky himself again, in student uniform, with several classmates, grouped around a silver punch bowl. The alcohol blazing in the bowl was slowly melting a sugar loaf perched on crossed swords above it. This photograph was dated 1917—a year marked by two notable events in Valsky's biography: graduation from the Riga Polytechnical Institute, and the end of his life of careless ease.

There were later photographs; but in these Valsky took no pleasure. They lay apart from the rest, in a little packet tied with black tape: another life, void of all hope for the return of the happy past.

Yet, suddenly, these hopes had revived. With the outbreak of the war, all that had so long seemed lost beyond return had become once more an object of eager expectation. All Valsky's thoughts had now been concentrated on remaining alive (no one in town had spent so many hours in the slit trenches as he!) and on preserving the deed to his father's estate. Locking the document into an iron box, he had buried it deep in the earth floor of his cellar. Should the house burn down, the deed would still be safe.

Then the Hitlerites had come, and Valsky's hopes had seemed to near fulfilment. Von Wechter had promised him every assistance, should he prove worthy. Well, and was not Valsky worthy? He had tried his very best. All had gone well, too, until things were spoiled by the obstinacy of those cursed workers, who refused to earn their bread by honest toil, and by the wild temperament of Sonderführer Geiss.

Valsky cherished no rancour against the Sonderführer. Even in his heart of hearts, he was afraid to admit the slightest ill feeling.

At length, realizing that there could be no question of his return to the works, Valsky applied at the town Kommandantur for a permit to leave for the Oryol gubernia and enter into possession of his father's estate.

After being put off several times, Valsky went in to see Pfaul personally. The Kommandant, however, referred him on to Obersturmführer von Stammer, the SD chief. And, trembling with secret dread, Valsky entered the grim Gestapo building.

Von Stammer was busy, and Valsky was kept in the waiting room for quite a long time. More than once, a woman's heart-rending screams reached his ears from the inner office.

Then the door opened. Two soldiers came out, dragging an elderly woman between them. The woman's eyes were shut, and her grey hair hung loose and tangled. When Valsky was called in, he could not at once get up from his chair.

The Obersturmführer received him coldly.

"I thought you stayed in town to help Germany achieve her splendid mission. But instead you worked very badly," he said in German. The interpreter repeated his speech in Russian.

Valsky launched into wordy explanations. He spoke in German, which he knew quite well, and von Stammer's mood softened perceptibly.

"Then I take it you want to help us, to work for us. Is that right?" he enquired graciously.

"Yes, yes, of course. I want very much to help, very much indeed," cried Valsky, pressing a hand to his heart in the plenitude of his emotion.

"What became of your estate under the Bolsheviks?" von Stammer asked.

"There was a state farm on it."

"Then there's no sense in your going there. The German commissary service is organizing former state farms into German government farms, for the time being, to supply our army. We'll find you a good position here. But still, why did you do so badly at the works?"

Valsky explained that the fault lay in the workers: that they were lazy, and did not want to earn their bread. He made no mention of Geiss.

"They'll work well enough," von Stammer returned, "when we wipe out all the Communists and partisans, that they still take orders from. In that, you will have to help us."

Valsky shrank back, terrified. He feared partisans more than anything else on earth.

Von Stammer understood his alarm.

"Oh, no!" he explained. "You'll be perfectly safe. You'll be appointed one of our senior informers, or residents. Informers will come to you at home to deliver their reports, and once a week our messenger will come to collect the reports for the political inspector. You see, the informers can't come here, or the whole town would guess what they are. This way, the secret is safe. Well, are you willing?"

Valsky thought of requesting time for thought, for consultation with his wife; but he glanced at the German, and, without a word, took a pen and tremulously signed the pledge of secrecy and active service for the SD.

"Remember," von Stammer said, instructing the new agent in his duties, "that we're interested in everything relating to the mood of the townspeople. Any expression of opinion, however insignificant it may seem, is important to us. Even facial expression. For example, a townsman smiles when German soldiers are being buried. That's sufficient. Today he smiles, tomorrow he will laugh, and the day after he will be killing our soldiers himself. We must destroy, not only partisans, but potential partisans as well. Is that clear?"

Before leaving, Valsky finally succeeded in obtaining a travelling permit for his wife, so that she might ascertain on the spot the condition of his property. He was extremely concerned lest the house had been burnt down, or the park destroyed.

The visits of the informers began the very next day. On Saturday, a messenger came and carried off the packet of reports denouncing persons who had expressed dissatisfaction with German rule.

By the time the second week was up, Valsky

found himself quite at home in his new profession. He was not overburdened with work, for the number of informers reporting to him was rather small: four seedy-looking individuals, all very much alike, ringing daily at his door. He would scold them when they came empty-handed, and praise them when the catch was rich, paying cash down for each report according to the established price list.

They were akin to him, these people, who had concealed their hate so long and so deep down, and even now avoided open combat. Indeed, he felt a certain envy for them. Should things go wrong, they alone would remain unnoticed, unexposed. Valsky admired the men who worked openly on the municipal board and in the police; but he did not approve their tactics. Who could tell how the fortunes of war might turn? Even a temporary capture of the town by the Red Army would mean grave peril for all who had acted openly, whereas nothing would threaten the cautious, unobtrusive informers.

As time passed, the resident's relations with his informers grew more and more friendly. Never before had Valsky been able to talk so volubly and freely. He had had no friends at the works, for lack of any common interests with the engineers surrounding him. But in these men—former

kulaks exiled by Soviet courts for counterrevolutionary activities, and one-time Whiteguards who had concealed their past through the years of Soviet rule -- he found fellow creatures, whom he could understand and like.

A note from von Stammer, brought by the usual messenger, somewhat dampened Valsky's spirits. The Obersturmführer wrote laconically:

"You're netting small fry. What we want are Communists, and above all, partisans."

A week passed. The informers discovered a few Communists, but no partisans. The resident's rations were reduced by half.

Another week passed, with no better success. Valsky was summoned to the Gestapo. Von Stammer received him even more severely than on their first acquaintance. He did not offer a chair, and Valsky remained standing uncomfortably throughout the interview.

"You don't know how to work," von Stammer drawled, without troubling to remove the cigarette from between his teeth. "We've given you a good network, yet all you catch is small fry. It's time you went after the big game. Get one thing clear: if we don't destroy the partisans, they're liable to destroy us. Those banditti are getting more and more insolent. They put out leaflets regularly, slandering the valiant German army."

He handed Valsky a typewritten sheet of paper, with a red star at the top. The text contained a detailed account of the rout of the Germans on the approaches to Moscow.

Valsky could not repress a nervous tremor. Here was full confirmation of the rumours he had heard concerning the Germans' reverses at the front! The leaflets with the red star at the top and the mysterious initials "T.C." below had never lied. This von Stammer knew as well as others, finding the Soviet leaflets a more reliable source of information from the front than any communiqués issued by the Hitlerite general staff.

"You'll never catch any partisans the way you've been going about it," von Stammer went on, when Valsky put the leaflet gingerly down. "You must try more subtle methods for getting on their track. The thing to do is organize a partisan detachment of your own."

Valsky stared at him blankly.

"Yes, organize a detachment of your own," the Obersturmführer repeated. "You can't angle without bait. Pick a dependable leader—one of your informers, or some one else you can vouch for—and have him get together a group of malcontents. So they won't suspect anything, you can incite them against the Italians. There's an Italian garrison in town. The Italians are very bad al-

lies. Our Führer's forerunner, Napoleon, said of them: 'To keep Italy cowed, you need one division; to occupy her, you need three; but to fight in alliance with her, you need ten—to fill the breaches in the Italian front.' Do you know what the Italians say? Three cities in Russia, they say, are impossible to take: Moscow, Leningrad, and Olkhovalka. There's a town for you: Ol-khovalka!"

He laughed. Valsky forced an obsequious smile; but his heart was in his throat. Then it was true that the German offensive had been stopped, that the front was near at hand! Now he understood why the informers wanted their fees in Soviet money, rather than German marks.

Von Stammer continued:

"The Italians need a little teasing, to make them fight better. Have your partisan detachment raid the Italian garrison and kill a few of their men. If you pick a clever leader, he'll be able to contact the partisan staff, and other partisan detachments. His group will grow like a rolling snowball. And then we'll swoop. Only the leader will escape, of course. We'll help him get across the front to the Reds, to carry on the work for us over there. Do you grasp the idea?"

"Yes. I understand," Valsky faltered, in his heart cursing the day and hour when he had connected himself with the Gestapo.

"Good. If you put the job over, you'll be awarded the fascist badge of honour." Proudly, von Stammer pointed to the black ostrich feather emblem on his chest. "If you don't, well..."

"I will, I will," babbled Valsky, terrified. "I'll do everything you say. I don't want anything much. Just to get back my estate."

"For good work, you'll get that too," the Obersturmführer promised.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

The German command was determined to restore the works machine shop, which before the war had serviced not only the entire works, but also a number of other local enterprises. In pursuit of this aim, the Germans brought in equipment from the most varied sources. Now and again new machine tools arrived from Germany. The workers would gather around these curiously, only to turn away with scornful smiles, exclaiming:

"Junk piles, not machines. Belt drives! We'd forgotten they existed!"

Sometimes, however, the shop received modern Soviet machine tools, equipped with individual motors. These the Germans captured on the railways, in damaged cars which had had to be

detached from evacuation trains on route. Of those already in the shop, only two were in working order. The rest had been skilfully wrecked, by unknown hands, the damage generally coming to light the first time they were tested.

The German machines could not be put into operation until the main transmission system had been assembled; and the assembly work advanced at a snail's pace. In the meantime, the transmission belts began to disappear, first from the shop, then from behind the locked doors of the store-room.

The Hitlerites raged and fumed. They arrested fitters, turners, assembly crews. They shot several, as a warning to the rest. But belts continued to disappear, and machines to break down. Could arrest or execution frighten those to whom the shop had become a prison, and life itself—slow death?

Two women were caught selling lengths of old belting at the market place. They were arrested and thrown into concentration camp. Belts ceased to appear in the market. But they continued to disappear from the shop.

Punishment overtook even the German foreman who had been assigned to the shop from one of the military labour units. For negligence and oversight, he was packed off to the front.

A new multiple drilling machine for armour plate arrived. Works owner von Wechter and Gestapo chief von Stammer, with a group of officers, came to the shop to witness the machine's first test run. Works manager Smakovsky followed, at a respectful distance. As always when Germans were present, his accustomed arrogance had disappeared, yielding place to an anxious subservieney.

Entering the shop, von Wechter turned straight to the new machine, without so much as a glance at the workers thronging around it. The sight of the huge mechanism brought a smile of satisfaction to his lips.

A similar satisfaction lit the features of foreman Vorobyov, a lean old man with a little, goatish beard. Stepping noiselessly in his high felt boots, Vorobyov hobbled slowly around the machine, paused for a moment to brush imaginary dust from the metal plate on the front, inscribed UZTM,* then took his place at the controls.

Von Wechter paused to admire the hermetically sealed reduction gear box. Through the thick glass, by the light of specially arranged

* UZTM—initials of the *Uralsky zavod tyazholovo mashinostroyeniya* (Urals Heavy Machine Building Works).
—Trans.

electric bulbs, he could see the cogwheels, in their bath of oil. This type of gear box was built to work for many years without replacement of any part.

Vorobyov kept brushing dust away, even where there was no dust—from the controls, from the very drills.

"Toadying, the old rat," one of the workers whispered to Pyotr Prasolov. "Under our own rule he was first in the shop, and he wants to be first now too!"

Completing his inspection of the machine, von Wechter glanced at the foreman and nodded haughtily.

Without an instant's delay, Vorobyov pressed the starter.

The motor began to hum, picking up speed. The cogwheels began to revolve. And suddenly a loud crack sounded in the gear box. The electric bulbs went out. Broken gear teeth and spattering oil came flying out through the shattered glass. The motor, freed of its burden, roared furiously, and the toothless gear wheels spun to a stop.

Vorobyov moved away with a puzzled air. He wiped his forehead with a big, checkered handkerchief.

Von Wechter, cursing frantically, strode up to the foreman. For some minutes they faced one

another silently: German baron, and Russian worker. Then the baron's hand dropped slowly into his pocket. Everyone noticed this—everyone but Smakovsky, who was still at a respectful distance. Suddenly, Smakovsky darted up to the old man, seized him by the beard, and jerked his head forward, bending him almost to the ground. Vorobyov grimaced with pain, but immediately pulled himself free and straightened up. And then occurred what none of the watchers could have expected. The foreman spat straight into the works manager's face.

Two Hitlerite soldiers sprang on the old man and began to beat him.

Pyotr shuddered at every blow, as though it were he that was being struck.

A broad-shouldered young worker—a former apprentice of Vorobyov's—pushed forward through the crowd. His face was distorted with anger. Pyotr noticed a heavy hammer in his hand.

"Drop it, Gudovich," Pyotr whispered. "Keep your head on. You can't do any good that way."

But Gudovich jostled stubbornly ahead. Pyotr seized the hammer and wrenched it away.

Noticing movement among the workers, the Hitlerites ordered them to disperse. The

crowd moved back a few steps, but did not break up.

Von Stammer issued an order in German, and strode away towards the exit. The others followed hastily, two soldiers dragging the unconscious foreman by the arms along the cement floor.

Someone was sobbing overhead. Pyotr looked up. It was the girl who ran the crane, high up in her cab. Setting his jaws, Pyotr turned away and went back to his work place.

"Clench your teeth till they crumble but keep yourself in hand," he told himself grimly.

Gradually, the workers drifted apart.

Half an hour later, a squad of soldiers armed with automatic rifles surrounded the damaged machine. Only when the soldiers were in place did von Stammer appear, followed by Geiss and Smakovsky. The works manager ordered Gudovich to assemble a crew of fitters and open up the gear box, so that the cause of the trouble could be determined. Pyotr Prasolov made himself one of this crew. No one had called for him. He came himself. Gudovich glanced at him, as though in understanding, and said nothing.

One of the fitters bent over the opening, fishing the broken gear teeth out of the oil bath and dropping them onto a sheet of roofing iron

which had been dragged up to the foot of the machine.

"That's all," he said finally, straightening up. Reaching for some waste, he began to wipe the lubricating oil from his arm and shoulder.

Smakovsky turned to Gudovich, commanding: "You look."

Gudovich began to search at the bottom of the gear box. His fingers touched metal: a small nut, with notched, uneven edges. Noiselessly, he shifted it to the farthest corner of the box. Pulling out his arm, he reported:

"Nothing there."

"Now you," Smakovsky ordered, beckoning to another of the fitters.

Almost at once, the worker's groping fingers shifted the nut. Iron scraped against iron.

Prasolov stiffened with apprehension.

Geiss darted to the fitter's side.

"There's nothing there," the man said glumly, turning away.

Geiss began to unbutton his coat.

Prasolov stepped up quickly and thrust in his arm. The thick sleeve of his padded jacket stuck in the narrow opening, and he had some difficulty in pushing it through.

Again iron scraped against iron. The workers waited breathlessly. Gudovich was tense and pale.

Von Stammer came closer, glancing significantly at his soldiers.

"Scoundrels! Sons of bitches!" Prasolov shouted, pulling out his arm. Again his sleeve stuck in the opening, but no one moved to help him. "Is that the way you search? Just look at this!"

With an effective gesture, he laid down on the sheet of iron—another broken tooth.

Geiss turned away. A moment later, however, evidently changing his mind, he threw off his coat and bent over the opening.

Gudovich cast an anxious glance at Pyotr.

The Sonderführer searched long and painstakingly at the bottom of the box; but there was nothing there. Turning to von Stammer, he shrugged perplexedly.

The cause of the trouble could not be determined.

Leaving the shop, von Stammer ordered Vorobyov released. Soon the old man came limping in, almost too weak to stand. Gudovich went up to him, and they sat down together beside the wrecked machine. Fingering the broken gear teeth, Vorobyov said:

"Good work, Kolya, eh?"

The teeth were ground to perfection.

"Very," Gudovich agreed. "They can't come

anywhere near it, over there." And he pointed at the German machines.

Vorobyov smiled.

"It's not that work I mean, but this," he returned, taking up a handful of the iron fragments. "A good job, eh?"

They sat there together for a long time, examining the broken gears and talking quietly.

Then the old man felt faint. Gudovich helped him to the office, where he lay down on a bench to rest.

Pyotr Prasolov was very happy at Vorobyov's safe return to the shop. He considered himself responsible for the old foreman's life.

It had all begun a month before, when Pyotr searched out the little house, not far from the Novy siding, where foreman Vorobyov lived with his wife and grandson. There had been no convenient building sites in town at the time when the old man put up his home, and so he had decided to settle here, "In the fresh air and not too far from the graveyard," as he half-seriously explained his choice.

For some time, Prasolov and his host talked at random—about the new order, the Hitlerites' brutalities, the news from the front, the lack of food, the situation at the works. The old man put many questions about the machine shop,

which he had not visited since the occupation. Pyotr talked lightly of one thing and another; but Vorobyov guessed at once that something serious lay behind this visit. When his wife left the room, he put the question bluntly:

"Now tell me what you're here for. Not just visiting, in times like this."

Looking straight into the old man's eyes, Pyotr took the plunge:

"Fyodor Pafnutyevich, the underground Town Committee needs your help."

"The Town Committee?" Vorobyov cried, at once aroused and disappointed. The Town Committee, he had imagined, should be made up of mature, respected leaders, men like Gayevoi, or Kravchenko. Yet here was his own apprentice, a rowdy youngster, claiming to represent it.

Glancing suspiciously at Pyotr, however, Vorobyov suddenly noticed a new, hard line at the corner of his mouth, a new severity in his eyes. "Well, well," he reflected amazedly. "How the lad has matured in this short time!"

"The Town Committee of the Bolshevik underground," Pyotr repeated.

"And what may the Committee want with my poor bones?"

"We can't do anything with the automatic machine tools," Pyotr confessed. "The old-type

machines give us no trouble. We steal parts out of them, or slit the belts. But now they've brought two Odessa milling machines, and we're stuck. You can't get near them. A sentry by each machine. And they keep them in a special aisle, with another sentry at the entrance. What can we do?"

Shrugging helplessly, the old man replied:

"But what good can I do you, Pyotr? I couldn't even make it to the works."

"There's no need for you to come to the works, Fyodor Pafnutyevich. You know yourself, how long the trains stand around at the sidings. The coal is German, and the engines don't like it, any more than we like the fascist rule."

"I get the idea," Vorobyov broke in, chuckling delightedly. "I understand. Good heads you've got, in the Town Committee! Good heads. They know who can help." And, his voice breaking with emotion, he added, "Many thanks to them—remembering the old man. What a fool I was not to think of it myself, with the machines standing here, right under my nose, for weeks on end! Just an old fool."

"Any tools needed?" Pyotr asked.

"Tools?" The old man's tone was almost angry. "Where'd you ever see a workman with no tools of his own at home? Go take a look in the

shed. I have more stuff out there than got left behind in the shop tool room, anyway."

From that day on, Prasolov knew that any machine tool arriving in the shop with a cross chalked on it was a dead letter, requiring no more worry on his part.

The multiple spindle drilling machine carried Vorobyov's mark; but it so turned out that the Germans, learning from someone about this highly-skilled mechanic, brought the old man to the shop and ordered him to prepare the machine for operation.

Now that Vorobyov had been released, Pyotr felt much better. The old man had been cruelly beaten; but he was alive, and free. Only—what to do now, when new machine tools arrived? Vorobyov could no longer carry on his nocturnal visits to the siding. He would be watched. That was what they had released him for.

Hearing footsteps behind him, Pyotr took up a wrench and set to work. Someone paused at his side. It was Gudovich.

"What a master of his trade!" Gudovich whispered enthusiastically. "Such skill and understanding! He did the job by night, don't forget, and yet he knew just how to tell the direction of revolution, and the point where the greatest damage could be done. I thought I was pretty

good, but I've a long way to go to catch up with the old man. And how many of us he's trained, too, in his day. There's a life to be envied!"

"Who's that you're talking about?" asked Pyotr indifferently, his eyes glued to his work.

He rather disliked Gudovich, and had never thought him a good comrade. Though known as a competent job setter and as a diligent student at the works evening school, Gudovich had always been unpopular among his comrades in the shop, who considered him a conceited and arrogant young fellow.

"Drop it, Pyotr. You know whom I mean," Gudovich returned, taking no offence at Prasolov's tone. "Fyodor Pafnutyevich has been giving me full instructions. He can't carry on any longer, they've crippled him so. 'I gave you my knowledge,' he says, 'and now I hand you on my task. Change your trade for a while, from setting to upsetting.' There's only one thing bothers me: why I never thought of it myself! Only if it was me, I wouldn't have put a nut in there—I'd have stuck in a hand grenade. Wouldn't it just have blown!"

Pyotr looked up. Gudovich's eyes gleamed with such genuine feeling that mistrust became impossible.

"And now show me that nut," Gudovich whispered, winking slyly.

After a wary glance around the shop, Pyotr produced the nut from an inner pocket.

For a long time Gudovich stood silently examining this battered bit of metal, by means of which an enormous machine had been rendered useless.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

After a thorough examination, the doctor turned away and said:

"You can go on with your activities."

These were the first words he had pronounced in all his visits.

When the doctor had left, Sergei Petrovich telephoned Pfaul, then dressed and went outdoors. His head swam with excitement, with weakness, with the freshness of the winter air. He paused to stare at the snow, white and glittering in the sun. Never before had he seen such unsullied snow in an iron and steel town. When the works was running, the snow could not be clean.

An unaccustomed stillness hung over the works territory. Only from the direction of the distant machine shop did a faint rumbling indicate that a big crane was in operation.

Gradually hastening his step, Krainev made his way to the central street of the works settlement. Empty shells of what had once been houses. Heaps of rubble inside, with rusty bed heads protruding from the crushed brick and plaster. Once cozy rooms, laid open to the street, some with the paint or wallpaper still intact: pink, blue, green. It was an appalling spectacle.

But more appalling still were the buildings which had escaped destruction. These were plastered with new signs: "Galaktionov, Esq., Dry-goods Emporium"; "Semenikhin's Bar and Restaurant"; "Germania Cinema Palace"; "District Police Headquarters." Next to the district police was an institution with no sign over its entrance—only a big red lantern, swaying gently in the wind.

Sergei Petrovich hurried on to the next corner, whence he could see the stacks of the power station. Smoke was rising over them! He stood as though in a trance, watching the wind catch up the smoke and blow it towards the town.

A rumbling and clattering around the corner brought him to himself. Tractors crawled past, towing two damaged tanks: the first, with a gaping hole in its thick side armour; the second, with its turret smashed into a shapeless mass of steel.

"To be repaired at the works," Krainev reflected bitterly.

Over the gates of the works, the old inscription, "State Iron and Steel Works," had been replaced by a small, hastily daubed signboard: "Baron von Wechter. Iron Works." Soldiers in mouse-grey overcoats, armed with automatics, paced up and down before the entrance.

When Krainev named himself to the politsei on duty, the man stared at him incredulously for a moment, then silently moved aside to let him pass.

"Must have heard about me," Sergci Petrovich reflected, with a grim smile. "Probably thought I was dead and buried."

He strode briskly up the asphalt walk to the administration building. How many times he had passed this way—now hurrying to the shop, now returning homewards, with that satisfying feeling of work well done which eliminates all weariness.

Soon he reached the familiar square in front of the administration building. It was here that he had first seen the Germans. His heart beat faster as he entered the building and mounted the stairs to the second floor. He began to pant for breath. Physical weakness, perhaps, after long weeks in bed; or perhaps it was nervous strain. He walked very slowly down the hall, trying to get his breathing back to normal. In what had been the

director's waiting room, he found a German officer on duty. Curtly stating his name, Krainev went straight to the office door and threw it open.

Von Wechter sat behind the desk, sprawled in the director's armchair. Before the desk stood a young boy, bareheaded, in torn, grease-stained overalls.

"Twenty times the lash," von Wechter said to the soldier standing just inside the door.

"For a lighter?" cried the youngster, close to tears. "I didn't steal it. I made it, myself. My mother asked me to. There's nothing to light the stove with."

"Out!" von Wechter ordered brusquely; and the soldier pushed the boy out of the room.

Von Wechter turned enquiring eyes on the stranger in the doorway.

"My name is Krainev," Sergei Petrovich explained. "I'm an engineer. I've come to ask about a position at the works."

A spark of interest appeared in von Wechter's eyes.

"I haff much heard from you," he said. "You safe for us the power station. You are to us the friend. Herr Pfaul hass told me. But you wass the chief from the open-hearth shop. Why iss that shop so hard blown up?"

"I had no hand in blowing up my shop. And what I saved for you was far more important. The power station is the master key to the whole works."

Von Wechter reflected briefly. Then he announced:

"You are appoint for the manager from the machine shop."

"But I'm a metallurgist, not a mechanic," Krainev objected.

"A metallurgist I am not need. I am need a strong hand, to kill the bacillus from Bolshevism. I wass think the Russian worker iss loafer. Now I understand: he iss saboteur. We must make him to work, so" - von Wechter seized a small bronze figure of a steel worker that stood on the desk, and clenched his fist around it savagely. "So must we make, to hold und not let loose. You are the manager from the machine shop. For gut work will you receif gut pay, promotion, und decoration for Eastern countries. Later can you haff small factory from your own."

Krainev left the office with mingled satisfaction and disappointment. It was well that he had received access to the works. He would now be able to contact comrades from the underground, and, with their help, to destroy the

power station. But it was disappointing that the station itself remained outside his official sphere of duty. Krainev did not yet know that access to the power station was forbidden even to the works manager.

For several days Sergei Petrovich spent most of his time in the machine shop office, studying the lists of workers. Then, one afternoon, he assembled all the men outside the tool room, where shop meetings and rallies had always been held.

By this time Krainev had begun to grow accustomed to the looks of open hostility flashed after him by one worker or another as he passed through the shop. But now he faced them all at once; and in every pair of eyes he read the same unconcealed and bitter hatred. Enemy guns would have been easier to face than this penetrating, annihilating stare.

For some minutes he did not speak.

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" a mocking voice called from the crowd.

How to begin? How to address them? He felt an almost unconquerable urge to call them, as always, "comrades." But that, of course, was out of the question.

"Citizens workers," he forced out at last; and even this form of address, he noticed, caused a ripple of surprise.

Pausing, he lit a cigarette. The workers were following his every movement. He felt that they all noticed how the match shook in his fingers.

"I'm going to establish order in this shop," he continued. "Beginning today—beginning now, any damage to machines will be answered for by the one who is really guilty."

"How are you going to find him?" someone shouted.

"That I'll tell each of you personally, after the meeting. I'll see you in my office, one at a time, by order of your timecard numbers."

"Sure, it's easier one by one!" came a loud voice from a far corner.

The rest of the day was spent on this reception of the workers. As each came in, Krainev would ask his name and number and check them on the lists. Then, with the greatest firmness he could muster, he would say:

"I suppose you've heard about coupled brigades, on the railways. We're going to have the same thing here. You're in charge of machine tool number twenty-three. You and your partner answer for it, shift by shift. If it breaks down in your shift, you go to the Gestapo. If it breaks down in your partner's shift, he goes to the Gestapo. Sign your name."

He played the part well, as the loathing in the workers' eyes eloquently testified.

They would sign the lists, opposite the numbers of their machines, and leave; and Krainev would look after them with jubilant admiration. He was proud of them. These were true, Soviet spirits. The enemy had not succeeded in crushing them, and never would succeed.

When the last worker left, Sergei Petrovich crumpled up the lists and threw them into the burning stove. Should he be killed, no one must find them, to use against the workers.

He sat for a while at the desk, his head sunk in his hands, then got up and set out for the open-hearth shop. It was high time he found someone who could help him to get in touch with Teplova.

Coming up onto the charging level, he paused involuntarily, shocked by the grim scene of devastation which opened before him.

All that remained of the furnaces were their metal ribs, protruding, twisted and rust-eaten, from among disorderly heaps of crumbled brick. Over the ruins of No. 3 loomed the huge block of metal that had been the last heat. Where No. 5 had stood, everything remained as on that fateful night when the life of the works had ceased: the testing spoon, dropped by the furnace door, and a pile of dolomite, brought up in preparation

for the next heat. Months of dampness had transformed the dolomite into a light, fluffy powder.

Voices sounded from the express laboratory. Sergei Petrovich looked in at the open door.

On a bench by the window sat Opanasenko and Sasha, absorbed in conversation. At the sound of footsteps, both sprang to their feet, as though caught in some misdemeanour.

"Sergei Petrovich," Opanasenko mumbled confusedly. His lips curved in a welcoming smile; but at once, remembering, he frowned sombrely.

Sasha tried to slip out of the room. Krainev blocked the way.

An awkward silence fell.

Krainev was the first to break it.

"Could you go out for a minute, Ippolit Yevstigneyevich," he requested, in the friendly tone he had always used with the head foreman.

"No, I couldn't," Opanasenko replied determinedly. "I'm the manager here. The machine shop is your grounds now, and you can just go there to order folks around. You and I are equal now. You can't boss me any more."

"So that's how it is," Krainev thought sadly. "So it wasn't just your house you were out to save. It was power you wanted, the right to command."

Aloud, he said:

"I just wanted a word alone with Sasha, here, to see if he wouldn't shift over to my shop. I need a clever youngster like him."

"Not on your life!" Sasha flashed angrily, still trying vainly to push out of the room.

And Opanasenko remarked, with a great show of dignity:

"You might have asked me about that first. That's the way such things are done: between manager and manager. Decent folk don't go around stealing each other's workers. I need a clever youngster myself."

"Look here, Ippolit Yevstigneyevich," Krainev returned, as mildly as he could, "can't you do me that much of a favour? Just a minute or two, to talk to the boy alone."

With an anxious glance at Sasha, Opanasenko left the room.

When he was gone, Krainev looked searchingly into the boy's eyes. Sasha bore his gaze steadily.

"Give this note to Valya Teplova," Krainev said, holding out an envelope.

Sasha turned pale, but replied, without an instant's hesitation:

"I don't know any Valya Teplova."

Sergei Petrovich could not restrain a smile. With a sadder swift movement, he thrust the

envelope into Sasha's pocket; and before the boy could collect his thoughts, he was out of the room and striding down the charging level. But Sasha immediately darted in pursuit.

"Take your note!" he cried, throwing the envelope after Krainev. "Teplova! What next?"

And he disappeared behind one of the furnaces.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

After that last interview at the Gestapo, Valsky lost all peace of mind. He was very anxious to earn the favour and gratitude of the German authorities; but at the same time he feared the vengeance of Soviet patriots. The news from the front was disquieting: on the approaches to Moscow, the Germans were fleeing; in the Donbas, their advance had been halted in the vicinity of Olkhovalka.

Night after night, when the informers had come and gone and Valsky remained alone (his wife having left to visit their estate), he would go to bed in a state of nervous tension that kept him tossing sleeplessly till dawn.

A week passed. The informers, fearing exposure, stubbornly refused to undertake the formation of the required pseudo-partisan detachment.

Valsky urged and pleaded, plied them with vodka, promised rewards—but all in vain.

On Saturday the messenger came and took the week's reports. An hour later, he came again, with a brief note from von Stammer: "I give you one more week."

This was the last straw. Valsky's nerves were reduced to such a state that he had to give up shaving, because the razor wobbled crazily in his trembling fingers.

And then, of a sudden, his star seemed to rise again.

A few minutes before curfew, one evening, someone knocked at Valsky's front door. It was an unexpected visitor: Pivovarov, whom Valsky had not seen or heard of since the occupation. Gaunt, ragged, unshaven, he made a miserable picture.

Valsky welcomed him heartily, setting out food and a full decanter of vodka. Yet they had not been too friendly in the old days, when they worked together in the open-hearth shop. Pivovarov had done his best to earn the manager's favour, sneering cynically, in private conversation, at all that he enthused over in public; but Valsky had always held warily aloof.

This time, Pivovarov felt his way cautiously. Only after several drinks was his tongue unloosed.

"I've come to you for advice, Ksenofont Petrovich," he said finally. "You're the only person in town I can talk to openly."

And he went on to relate how he and Lobachov had conspired to save the power station for the Germans. After the fuses had been fired, and Nechayev and Lobachov had run off—the former to the administration building, the latter to his home—he, Pivovarov, had entered the station and snipped off the burning ends. After the second firing, he had succeeded in repeating this operation. Krainev had caught him at it, but he had fooled Krainev with a forged note. After Krainev left, he had removed the detonators and set fire to the cases of ammonite, to make their explosion impossible. All had gone well. As soon as the Germans entered the town, he and Lobachov had had a few drinks, to celebrate. But morning had brought Krainev, with several German soldiers. Krainev had shot Lobachov point-blank, and Pivovarov had barely managed to escape down the back stairs. Thoroughly frightened, he had left town, and spent all these months in hiding in a distant village.

What else could he have done? Not come to the Germans, certainly, when they were hunting him! Denounce Krainev? But who would have believed him, when Krainev had anticipated

him and Lobachov, had gained the Germans' complete confidence?

Then had come the news of Krainev's death, and Pivovarov had returned to town. But Krainev, it transpired, was not dead. He was still alive, still dangerous. Pivovarov was in despair.

"I simply don't know what to do, Ksenofont Petrovich," he concluded. "I'm afraid to go to the Germans. I'm afraid of bumping into Krainev. I've nothing to live on. It's shipwreck, Ksenofont Petrovich."

Muddled with drink, he did not notice the new glitter in Valsky's eyes.

When Pivovarov fell asleep, huddled up on a couch in the parlour, Valsky began to pace the room with hurried step, unable to control his exultation.

"What a find!" he whispered jubilantly. "Now I'll get even with you. Comrade Krainev!"

There was no one in the world whom Valsky hated as he hated Krainev. Who but Krainev had brought the work of the shop up to normal in one short month, demonstrating to all that Valsky's administration had been utterly incompetent? Who but Krainev had mastered a new and most difficult armour steel from the first heat, thereby gaining tremendous prestige throughout the works?

Doubting from the first that Krainev could be sincere in his service to the Germans, Valsky had thus far seen no possibility of proving his suspicions. Now, all was clear. Krainev was playing a double game.

Valsky felt a passionate desire to be present at Krainev's examination—to question him himself, and force a confession by whatever means might be required.

"It won't be so easy to trip him up," Valsky reflected. "He's credited with saving the power station, and now he's pulling the machine shop into shape. But what's all that, compared with the live evidence asleep right here on my couch!"

He glanced almost tenderly at the drunkenly snoring Pivovarov—a veritable gift of fate! And suddenly another happy thought occurred:

"There's the man to lead my 'partisan' detachment! Who could be better? He always made himself out a patriot, and he's been hunted by the Germans, too."

Valsky poured himself a glass of vodka, and gulped it down. Now he would live! Now the Germans would reward him as he deserved, would return him his estate.

"It's mine, mine, mine!" he whispered ardently.

What a shame, however, that life, real life, was returning to him so late!

He went to the mirror and stood for a long time examining his puffy, wrinkled face, with the line of greying bristle on the upper lip.

In the morning Valsky made Pivovarov repeat his story, and wrote it down word for word. Then, after another drink, they appointed their next meeting, and Pivovarov left.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Works director Rotov had never been able to find a chief engineer who would suit his requirements and with whom he could get along peaceably. Rotov applied criterions of his own to each new appointee; and his criterions were never satisfied. He wanted a talented chief engineer, and a submissive one. But these two qualities seldom go together. Complaisant docility, he found, distinguished only the mediocre; and gifted engineers invariably proved refractory and self-willed. In either case, a clash was inevitable. Docile appointees failed to satisfy the director because they could not cope with their work; talented ones—because they refused him unconditional obedience.

Rotov himself, before his directorship, had worked for many years as a rank-and-file engineer.

Graduating with honours from a metallurgical institute, where he had combined brilliant study with active leadership in the Party organization, Rotov had caused a sudden furor by requesting an assignment to a blast furnace shop, in the capacity of furnaceman's helper.

"As an ordinary helper? Why?" demanded the members of the board assigning the graduates to their first positions.

"At the blast furnace? Why, when you've specialized in open-hearth?" demanded an eminent professor, who had vainly urged Rotov to stay on at the institute for postgraduate study.

"Precisely because I've specialized in open-hearth," Rotov answered. "I know that field. I can do the melter's job, and I can do the foreman's. Now I want to learn the ins and outs of blast furnace production too, and just as thoroughly."

This decision had taken shape in Rotov's mind after an incident observed at the works to which he had been sent for student practice two or three years before.

During Rotov's practice period, this works was visited by the head of the Central Board—

later to be appointed People's Commissar of the Iron and Steel Industry. Accompanied by Valsky, the hysterically vociferous shop manager, the visitor made the round of the open-hearth furnaces, pausing lengthily at each. When they reached the furnace at which Rotov was working as first helper, Valsky glanced at the assay just taken, and, to demonstrate his efficiency, demanded contemptuously of the foreman:

"What are you holding the heat up for? Can't you see it's ready?"

The foreman was a touchy old veteran, who had always detested the shop manager for his contemptuous attitude towards the actual processes of production; for the fact that he had never in his life tapped a heat of steel; for the purely administrative measures by which he tried to run the shop. Smiling grimly into his bushy moustache, the old man thrust the slag skimmer into Valsky's hand and said:

"If you think it's ready, Ksenofont Petrovich, you can tap it yourself."

He turned on his heel and stumped away, leaving Valsky dumbfounded and helpless.

The chief of the Central Board smiled, barely perceptibly, but made no comment.

Valsky finally pulled himself together. Seeking the simplest way out of his predicament,

he sent a messenger to fetch another foreman.

But the head of the Central Board took the skimmer from Valsky's nerveless fingers, and ordered a new assay taken. When the spoon was brought up, he skimmed off the slag crust with a quick, practised movement—and, frowning disgustedly, ordered the gas turned higher. Only half an hour later did he pronounce the heat ready for tapping.

Later, Rotov learned that the head of the Central Board, when already a graduate engineer, had gone to work as a rank-and-file tecmer, and then risen gradually, rung by rung, up the entire production ladder. Such all-round experience, Rotov quickly realized, was indispensable for the engineer of the new school. From that time on, he utilized every moment of his student practice periods to the full; and by the time he graduated he had already carried out successfully the duties of foreman in a small open-hearth shop. On receiving his diploma as a steel metallurgist, he firmly made up his mind to attain an equally exhaustive knowledge of all the other aspects of iron and steel production. He was confident that important work awaited him in future; and he went about preparing himself for this work with the unhurried thoroughness of a deep-sea naviga-

tor making ready for a distant and protracted voyage.

Rotov, even in youth, had the appearance of a man born to organize and command. People stopped to stare when they saw him hauling sand in the blast furnace shop, his massive figure standing out in strange contrast to that of the wiry youngster doing the same work beside him. But he did not haul sand long. He soon became blast furnaceman, and later foreman. His shift advanced rapidly to first place, and was awarded the shop banner, which it held tenaciously from that time forth. Then Rotov was offered the post of assistant shop manager. This he persistently refused. He needed free time, of which an administrative post would rob him. His shift over, he would take a hasty meal in the shop dining room and hurry off to some other part of the works. Now in one shop, now in another, he would spend as much as five or six hours daily in an intensive study of plant and processes. A problem which particularly interested him was that of the causes of delays and breakdowns; and he devoted much time to a quest for ways and means of their prevention. Hearing of a protracted heat in the open-hearth shop, or of damaged rollers in one of the mills, he would hurry to the spot and observe attentively the

measures taken to renew normal production. Aside from such interruptions, however, his work was very systematic. Having chosen a definite shop, he would concentrate his entire effort on it, visiting it daily until he had learned all that interested him there. This made things more convenient, as the workers in the shop would soon grow accustomed to his presence, and he could be at ease with them. He was generally taken for a student on practice work, and this impression he did not trouble to correct.

One of his former classmates, already risen to the post of blooming mill shop manager, once asked him, half in jest, half in earnest:

"Why don't you shift to the engineering department, Leonid, as a breakdown inspector? That seems to be your hobby. Or are you training yourself for the job of chief engineer?"

Without a hint of a smile, Rotov answered:

"You've guessed it. I am. And I know I'll make a good chief engineer, too, whereas you.... You don't even seem to be making a good shop manager."

The blooming mill shop manager flushed. His shop was not working well. Stoppages were frequent, and spoilage high.

In revenge, he publicly dubbed Rotov "chief engineer in training." The name stuck; but

Rotov was neither offended nor embarrassed by it.

The years rolled on. Rotov was in no hurry, and no one hurried him. He continued his work, his visits to other shops, his insatiable reading. He had no family to support. On the contrary, his father, a template maker at the Krasny Putilovets works, earned quite enough to be able to help the young engineer in case of need.

Girls were irresistibly attracted to Rotov, though he could hardly be called handsome. He had a large, bulging forehead, over wide-set eyes; a blunt, stubborn nose; heavy lips, determinedly set; coarse, unruly hair—nothing, it might seem, to please the eye. But there was a strength within him, clearly to be sensed in his firm gait, in his confident, unhurried manner of speech, in his entire figure—a strength which drew and conquered.

He, too, was attracted at times; but nothing ever came of it. Girls will not long be interested in a young man who can spare them only one evening a week. They would soon be drawn away by other admirers, less occupied and more attentive.

And yet, in the end, one girl gave him her heart without demanding that he give up his work.

For a long time, Rotov painstakingly evaded participation in the general life of the works, begrudging the hours this would cut from his already 'crowded day. At length, he was summoned to the Party committee and asked to explain himself.

The Party secretary, Gayevoi—another of Rotov's former classmates—let him talk his fill, listening attentively, but disapprovingly.

"Plyushkin*—that's who you are," he exclaimed, when Rotov had finished. "Plyushkin, just as Gogol drew him. Storing up knowledge in a sock under your pillow. To my mind, you've stored up quite enough to begin sharing with others. If you go on this way much longer, you're liable to make a habit of it--always receiving, and never giving. But let's compromise. I'll give you an assignment that will suit your tastes. Write for the works newspaper about the different shops: the leading ones, and, especially, the lagging ones, with a thorough analysis of their work. For a beginning, take the blooming mill shop, and then the open-hearth."

Gayevoi was right. His proposal suited Rotov perfectly. Besides production problems, Rotov

* Plyushkin—a miser masterfully portrayed in Gogol's *Dead Souls*.—*Trans.*

now felt the need to delve into economics. This made him a frequent visitor to the planning department, where he received data on the various shops from a girl economist named Ludmilla. Such was the beginning of their acquaintance.

Rotov's first article dealt with unutilized possibilities for increased production in the blooming mill shop, still under the management of the classmate who had nicknamed him "chief engineer in training." The article was discussed at an open Party meeting, attended by all the works authorities. There were those who attempted to refute it. Chief engineer Stokovsky accused the author of ignorance and presumption. Rotov parried these attacks with sarcastic retorts, and jotted down notes for a biting speech in reply; but he soon realized that no speech was necessary. The meeting recognized the truth of the article, and voted that Rotov be delegated to reinforce the Party unit in the blooming mill shop.

A month later, a second article appeared. Devoted to the open-hearth shop, it carried the heading: "Where Is the American School Leading Us?"

Sayle was furious. Stokovsky stopped speaking to Rotov. Gayevoi exulted.

At the open Party meeting which followed, Stokovsky termed the proposals made in this article "technological rowdyism." Rotov, in turn, called the chief engineer a conservative and a coward. Afterwards, Ludmilla, now Rotov's wife, asked her husband:

"Suppose you were appointed chief engineer, Leonid? Would you accept?"

"What are you thinking of, Ludmilla?" he returned. "I don't know nearly enough for that yet! Take the power system—I don't know a thing about it. I'm planning to shift to the power station for a while, and do some work on the maintenance crew."

Rotov had already repeatedly refused the position of assistant manager of the blast furnace shop. When pressure was increased, and he began to fear that the appointment could not be avoided, he went to the Party committee one day and asked Gayevoi bluntly:

"Do you want more production from the blooming mill?"

"Funny questions you ask," Gayevoi returned, with an ironic smile. "You know perfectly well the blooming mill is holding up the whole works."

"Well, then, help me get appointed foreman at the pit furnaces."

"An idea?"

"Yes."

"Let's hear it."

Briefly, Rotov explained what he had in mind.

The blooming mill was held back by the pit furnaces. The mill's rated capacity could easily be exceeded, by as much as fifty per cent; but the pits did not heat enough metal to keep the mill supplied. In accordance with the American designs, four ingots at a time were placed, upright, in each of the pits. What Rotov proposed was the addition of two more ingots in each pit, laid across the first four.

"Well, and what's worrying you?" Gayevoi enquired.

"Everyone objects. The shop manager, the engineering department, the chief engineer."

"What do they say?"

"They say plenty, and they write more."

Rotov produced a sheaf of papers: his proposals, and the replies of the authorities.

The shop manager, citing American experience, wrote that the floor girders would not hold out under such a load; that the flow of gas in the pits would be affected; that the contraction cavities in the ingots would be displaced.

Stokovsky had simply drawn a heavy-line across Rotov's text, from corner to corner, and

written briefly at the top: "Technological banditism!"

"You don't get along with the Americans, I notice," Gayevoi remarked. Graduated as a mechanical engineer, he hesitated to decide in questions of metallurgy.

"I don't get along with anyone who claims that things can only be done as they always have been done," Rotov declared. "What interests me is, how to do things differently--and better."

"I suppose, one of these days, you'll be telling us we ought to turn the blast furnaces upside down," said Gayevoi lightly, seeking to gain a little time for reflection.

"Stop fencing, Grisha. It's not much I'm asking of you. Help me get transferred to the blooming mill shop."

"And what will you do there, once you're transferred?"

"That's my business."

"No, it's not. I have to know."

"When I'm on duty in the night shift, I'll put six ingots apiece in a few of the pits, keep track of their heating and rolling, and set apart samples for testing. And if everything works out all right, in my next shift I'll do the same with all the pits."

"But if something goes wrong? If the girders are really damaged?"

"Ah, how can you talk about girders? Suppose one or two do snap? They can be repaired. And just think—if all goes well! It will mean four thousand tons, instead of twenty-seven hundred. You know what every ton of steel means to the country today."

For a long time Gayevoi sat thinking silently. Losing patience, Rotov demanded:

"Well? Have you made up your mind?"

"No," Gayevoi replied. "That's not what I've been thinking about. I've just been wondering where you're going to end up. How's an engineer to grow, if he doesn't stick to one shop? Here we've been trying to make you assistant manager in the blast furnace shop. As soon as you proved your ability, you'd be appointed manager. And instead of that, you're clamouring to start from the bottom again in another shop. You should have been shifted to administrative work long since. Retarded development—that's the only word for it."

This was too much for Rotov. The term "retarded development" had clung to him all through his schooldays, despite the fact that he had always led his class. Taller and broader of shoulder than any of his classmates, he had seemed much their

senior; and on more than one occasion he had had to show his birth certificate to prove his youth.

"If I'm retarded, you're ignorant," he exclaimed angrily. "I've come to you as an engineer and a Communist, to ask for help. It was your idea to have me attached to the blooming mill Party unit. Well, then, here's the result of my work there. Make up your mind. There's no one else I can go to. The director's away. He'd back me up, I know, if he were here. Will you help, or won't you?"

"Yes, I will," said Gayevoi, realizing that in another moment Rotov might sling out of the room and slam the door behind him. "Whatever comes of it, we'll share the consequences. You won't get off without an official reprimand, of course—maybe even worse than a reprimand. Stokovsky will never let a chance like that slip by! But I'll stand up for you in the Party organization. There the responsibility will be all mine. Only, to be frank, there's one thing I still can't make out: do you really know as much as you seem to, or don't you know anything at all?"

"Well, if I don't, there's nothing so bad about that," Rotov returned defiantly. "Take Bessemer. Remember what he said? That it was complete ignorance of metallurgy that helped him invent

his new method of producing steel. Yes, because he wasn't tied down by dogmas or canons of any kind. But I can tell you what the real trouble will be, if we succeed. The blooming mill will run short of ingots. The open-hearth shop won't keep it supplied."

Gayevoi's eyes flashed.

"Splendid!" he cried. "Why, that will be just splendid, Leonid. Stokovsky goes around fussing over that damned Sayle of his like a hen with one chick. He has no need to hurry. There's plenty of steel to keep the rest of the works going. But if the blooming mill starts pressing on their heels, Sayle will have to go, and maybe Stokovsky too. Scoundrels, both of them, holding everything back! Well, and as far as your talk about ignorance goes, that's pure paradox."

Gayevoi detested the chief engineer, for his lordly airs, his pompous self-confidence, his conservatism. Intuitively, he felt that Stokovsky was an enemy at the works. But this was not an easy thing to prove.

"We'll try it out in some of the pits this very night," Gayevoi continued enthusiastically. "Only not so simply as you suggest. We'll take the manager of the blooming mill shop in hand, and pick our workers: put the shop's best operator at the mill, the best men at the pits, the best drivers on

the cranes. We'll call in all the Party members in the administration, to witness the test. And let anyone who pleases try to pick on you afterwards. It's a play for big stakes. If we win, it means thousands of tons of steel, and all the old quotas go head over heels. If we lose..." Gayevoi paused a moment, then concluded: "If we lose, you and I go head over heels."

Rotov was watching him admiringly. This was the Gayevoi he had known so well for his Party activities, back in their student days: eager, enthusiastic, fearless of risk.

"There's no time to lose," Gayevoi went on. "The director's left for Moscow, to stand up for Grigoryev and try to get rid of Sayle. If everything goes well, we'll wire him right away. Do you realize what a help that will be to him? It will put the question straight: the furnaces will simply have to be pushed, whether Sayle and Stokovsky like it or not."

Turning to the telephone, Gayevoi dialled the personnel department, and said:

"Transfer Rotov to the blooming mill shop. Today. At once. Don't consult anyone. I'll fix it up with the shop managers myself."

Then he dialled the blast furnace shop. With his hand over the speaking tube, he told Rotov cheerfully:

"Well, the lawbreaking's begun. Now get out. I'm going to call in the blooming mill folk."

With his free hand, he gathered up Rotov's papers and locked them in his safe. Assuming an air of mock severity, he added:

"You may go, Comrade Rotov. Your proposal has been accepted."

Rotov came to the pits in the middle of the evening shift. All those concerned in the experiment were already in the shop. Gayevoi was cheerful and animated; but the blooming mill shop manager, beside him, hung his head dejectedly. Whatever the outcome of the test, the manager knew, Stokovsky would be sure to take it out on him; and the more successful the test, the more severe the punishment.

When Rotov set to work, Gayevoi stared at him amazedly. Where had the man lost his heavy, tranquil gait, his unhurried manner of speech? He flew from pit to pit, superintending the placing of each extra ingot, shouting at the crane drivers, and cursing at every delay as he had never been heard to curse before. By the time the night shift came on, every pit held six ingots. Now the shop's best operator took his place at the blooming mill controls. Rotov hastened to his side. The operator worked with passionate concentration, never for an instant lifting his hands from the controls.

The seven-ton ingots sped across the roll table to the mill. Passing between the rolls—in and out, back and forth—they grew steadily thinner, longer. Rotov ran off to the pits, then hurried back to the mill again. When the shift ended, with an output of twelve hundred tons in place of the usual eight hundred, he went home to sleep, worn out with the night's physical and nervous strain. But it was a long time before he could doze off. His eyes would not stay closed. Nor was it restless thoughts that kept him awake. He did not think. He simply rejoiced, rejoiced in every fibre of his being.

Towards evening, Gayevoi arrived, striding briskly into the room, even more aroused than during their talk at the Party committee office.

"There's grey at his temples, but what youthful spirit in his eyes!" Ludmilla reflected, glancing up at him. "He'll never be old!"

Throwing his cap onto the sofa, Gayevoi announced:

"Victory, and defeat! Stokovsky's removed the shop manager and appointed him head foreman at the pit furnaces, so no one else will ever try to follow his example."

"And Leonid?" asked Ludmilla anxiously.

"Discharged from the works," Gayevoi replied, with no appearance of concern.

Rotov turned pale. He had expected anything but this. But Gayevoi went on:

"Don't you worry, Leonid. It's all to the good. Stokovsky's going too far, and that will help to expose him. You just stay home quietly and rest. Take Ludmilla to the theatre, while you're free. You don't give her too much time when you're working, I know."

Two engineers, Rotov and Grigoryev, stayed at home, waiting impatiently for the director's return. A third, the former blooming mill manager, watched day and night at the pits, lest anyone attempt to repeat Rotov's experiment.

When the director returned, Rotov's new system was established by special order as the normal reheating procedure. After the defeat of Sayle's American school in the open-hearth shop, Stokovsky was transferred to subordinate work in the equipment department of the People's Commissariat.

Soon after Stokovsky's departure, Rotov was appointed manager of the blast furnace shop. This position, however, could not satisfy him, as everyone saw clearly. Accustomed to interest himself in the doings of the entire works, he quickly brought his shop to rights and then continued his visits to the other shops, to the construction sites, to the planning department.

A year later, he was appointed assistant to the chief engineer; soon after that--chief engineer. His appointment surprised none, but alarmed many. Rotov knew every aspect of the work, and he was no less exacting towards his subordinates than towards himself.

When, finally, he was appointed works director, he could not bring himself to resign the reins of direct technological control; and he kept them in his hands as formerly. Where he found time for everything, it was hard to tell. The day would be devoted to the main shops, the evening to the auxiliary shops and departments, and half the night to reading and study. On rest days, the director would raid the shops to send home those overzealous managers who came to work instead of resting with their families. Implacably demanding where work was concerned, he was at the same time constantly solicitous for his subordinates' rest and general well-being.

On the shore of a pleasant mountain lake, forty kilometres from the town, a resort was built for the works personnel and their families: rest home, open-air theatre, cinema, restaurant, bathing beach, boating station. On the opposite shore gleamed the white tents of the children's Pioneer camp.

Rotov had begun the construction of this resort while he was still chief engineer. This had constituted direct interference in the director's administrative functions; but such was Rotov's nature. He could not refrain from interfering in everything. And just as this trait of character had brought him, when chief engineer, into conflict with the director, it later brought him, as director, into conflict with each successive chief engineer.

Then, one day, a skinny little man came into the director's office and laid down on the desk an order signed by the People's Commissar, appointing Mokshin, Yevgeni Mikhailovich, chief engineer at the works. While Rotov scanned his appointment, the new chief engineer settled down in an armchair and busied himself silently with his eyeglasses, which had filmed over when he came in from the frost. Rotov stared across the desk in undisguised amazement at Mokshin's slight, seemingly fragile, figure, at his squinting, nearsighted eyes, framed in short reddish lashes.

By this time Rotov had come to regard himself as infallible, and his course as the only correct path of development for a Soviet engineer. This puny creature, with a head that seemed too big for his body—Rotov could not by any

effort of imagination picture him at work in the shops. Even his hands were small and delicately shaped, like a woman's.

The director received Mokshin with cold hostility.

"Have you ever run a shop?" he demanded, in a tone which seemed to imply that his acceptance or non-acceptance of the new appointee would depend on the answer to this question.

Mokshin nodded. His lips were so tightly compressed that it seemed he could not part them.

"Where?" the director persisted.

Mokshin opened his lips, not without effort, and replied, in an unexpected bass:

"If you're interested in my biography, comrade director, you can read my registration card in the personnel department. Right now, I suggest we waste no time on trifles. The works is in no state to allow delay. Though we won't discuss the works either, for the time being. I want to look things over first. From today, I answer for technological policy. Everything else remains in your hands. I have my instructions from the People's Commissar, personally. Incidentally, I might as well tell you one of the things he said. Here it is, word for word: 'They think they're doing wonders, at that works, because of their

big scale of operations. But their quality is low. They've forgotten that quantity is a dead letter without quality.'"

Rising, he shook the director's hand—his delicate fingers, it transpired, were very strong—and left the office.

For perhaps the first time in his life, Rotov was too taken aback to speak.

Of all the chief engineers who had worked under Rotov, Mokshin proved the most disturbing. He confidently assumed his place in the works administration, and Rotov felt himself suddenly debarred from much of his former activity. To retain contact with the shops, he finally began to alternate with Mokshin in receiving the daily general reports. At times he used his power as director to alter or countermand some measure ordered by the chief engineer. In every such case, however, Mokshin gave him clearly to understand that he was wrong.

One such incident, occurring a few months after Mokshin's appointment, somewhat shook the director's faith in his own infallibility.

He had long been planning to shut down the shops for twenty-four hours in order to clean the gas line, and he and Mokshin agreed on June first as a convenient day. This was in 1941. When the order for the stoppage appeared over Mok-

shin's signature, however, Rotov took offence at the chief engineer's initiative, and, to assert his directorial authority, changed the date to July first.

But June 22 brought war. With the transition to war production, Rotov felt that the planned shutdown had become entirely out of the question. He realized, of course, that in the end a stoppage, perhaps considerably longer than the originally planned twenty-four hours, would be inevitable; but he saw no way out of the situation. Conscious of his own guilt, he could not bring himself to take counsel with the chief engineer. Mokshin, for his part, maintained a stubborn silence, which Rotov interpreted as malicious gloating over the bitter lesson the director had had to digest.

When the end furnaces in No. 2 open-hearth shop began to run cold, Rotov felt that he was up against a stone wall. Production could not be halted; yet production could not long continue.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

To determine the victors in the somewhat unusual contest launched in No. 2 open-hearth shop as a result of Makarov's innovations, a jury was set up, consisting of the secretary of the shop

Party bureau, the chairman of the shop trade union committee, and—despite his protest—assistant manager Grigoryev.

The jury's decision took no one by surprise. First place was adjudged to Shatilov and Permyakov, and second place to furnace helper Ivan Smirnov, whose record heats on the days when he worked as melter had quickly made a name for him throughout the shop.

What did surprise the steelmen was the fact that, while Permyakov was promoted—receiving the post of charging foreman—Shatilov and Smirnov remained furnace helpers as before. It now became their task to train the other helpers in the art of plugging the taphole with the gas on.

To Shatilov, this work was torture. Plugging a taphole once a day is not so bad. Ten minutes of intolerable heat, and the job is done. As instructor, however, he was compelled to perform this task some five or six times in the course of his shift. He tied a kerchief over his face; but the cloth could not protect his still tender skin from the furnace heat. Yet he made no complaint. The work had to be done, and there was no one else who could do it.

Then, one day, the director noticed him, and smiled at the sight of a furnace helper with his face bound up against the heat. But when Shatilov

removed the kerchief, the director's smile changed to a frown. The skin on the helper's cheeks was crimson and inflamed.

"Call the shop manager," Rotov commanded; and when Makarov came up he shouted, pointing at Shatilov:

"Have you got a conscience? Or did you leave it behind in the Donbas? Put this man on other work immediately!"

"I volunteered for this work myself, comrade director," Shatilov put in, before Makarov could answer.

"No one's asking you," said Rotov brusquely. Turning on his heel, he left the shop.

This was Makarov's first personal encounter with the director. The general reports were conducted over the group selector telephone system, so that the shop managers communicated with the director or the chief engineer from their own offices.

When the report was conducted by the chief engineer, Makarov always experienced a pleasant satisfaction. Mokshin put his questions in brief and precise form, demanding equally brief and precise replies. He settled problems swiftly, conclusively, and left no request unanswered. The report, as he conducted it, became a punishment to some, a source of encouragement to others; for

his voice had a hundred different intonations, clearly conveying his reaction to the achievements or failures reported.

With Rotov at the microphone, the report was always a punishment. The director was invariably rude and impatient, intolerant of all requests.

"Open-hearth two," he would say into the microphone, when Makarov's turn came to report; and Makarov would respond briefly:

"Plan fulfilment 112 per cent; quality as per specifications; gas needed."

"I've already heard about gas. Yesterday and the day before."

"You'll hear about it again tomorrow and the day after."

Flaring up, Rotov would exclaim:

"Make a phonograph record, then, and play it into the microphone every morning. 'Gas, gas, gas.'"

Rather than return rudeness for rudeness, Makarov would fall silent.

Nechayev, manager of the finishing bay of No. 2 blooming mill, had the worst time of all. Rotov dragged him over the coals during every report.

"Wait till we have a closed Party meeting," Makarov would tell himself, after such clashes. "He'll have to stand up and answer me, there."

Under Makarov's management, the shop's output had risen ten per cent. This was only one-fifth of the increase required to reach the figure named by the People's Commissar. But it was the utmost that could be achieved, he clearly realized, until the problem of gas was solved.

In discussing the results of the melters' contest, the steelmen demanded that the shop management provide proper conditions for systematic high-speed heats in all the furnaces. Above all else, they called for gas.

And, entrusting much of the daily shop routine to Grigoryev, who had proved an excellent assistant, Makarov devoted himself to this vital problem. For a beginning, he decided to investigate the state of affairs at the coking plant.

Every morning, when the general report was over, he would strike out across the works territory to the batteries; and every morning he would receive one and the same reply:

"You get little because you take little."

True enough, the gauge invariably indicated a high gas pressure.

Makarov spent all his evenings on intricate calculations: checking the amount of gas produced and the amount consumed, estimating the output of gas per ton of coal. Everything seemed to be

normal. Everything but the coking process, which was somewhat slow.

It was at the coking plant that Makarov had his second encounter with the director, coming face to face with him in front of the pressure gauge. Rotov frowned.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Searching for gas," Makarov replied.

"Do your searching in your own shop, and be good enough to forget that you were once chief engineer somewhere. Now you're simply a shop manager."

"I've already forgotten that I was once chief engineer," Makarov said quietly. "But I still remain an engineer, and that I have no intention of forgetting."

Turning contemptuously away, Rotov told the manager of the coking plant:

"Don't let him in here again. It's time he knew his place."

Pale with indignation, Makarov returned to his shop, ordered a car, and drove to the post office to wire the People's Commissar:

"Request transfer any works any job Makarov."

In the evening, however, when he had rested a little, and played awhile with Vadim, he began to regret his telegram.

Again migration, again new work. Who could tell what he would find there? His character would remain the same, wherever he went. And what would the People's Commissar think of such a sudden, unexplained request?

Obedient to a habit which had grown into a daily need in their years of life together, Markarov told his wife what had occurred.

"No, you shouldn't have done that," she said thoughtfully, when he had finished. "If we have to move, of course, we'll move. That's not the point. What you ought to do is write the People's Commissar a letter. Explain to him, just how things stand, and ask him not to pay any attention to your telegram."

CHAPTER FORTY

The Urals veteran and the young steelman from the Donbas became fast friends.

Permyakov was not one to open his heart lightly. It was his habit to hold off, reserved and watchful, weighing and measuring by his own stern standards, before according anyone his friendship.

But Shatilov, with his mastery at work, his infectious energy, his cheerful, open ways, was very easy to understand and like.

The elderly melter's severity thawed swiftly, and to the last.

On the evening of the jury's decision, Permyakov and Shatilov left the shop together. Walking slowly down the deserted street, they discussed the work of their fellow melters—the merits of some, the shortcomings of others.

"Ivan Smirnov, now," Permyakov exclaimed. "Why, he was second helper. Only substituted, now and then, for first. And yet it turns out he can do the melter's job! It's the same way with neighbours, sometimes. You live right next door to people, and you don't know a thing about them. Of course, Ivan was always right at my heels, watching everything I did. That's true. But he hardly ever asked me any questions. Though, come to think of it, what was there to ask? He got the theory of the job in his trade school. All he needed was experience."

At the crossing where their ways parted, Shatilov said goodbye and started to move off; but Permyakov detained him by the flap of his padded jacket—thrown open, as always, despite the Siberian frosts—and said:

"Wait a minute, Vasya. Once you and I share first place, I've something else I'd like to share with you."

"What is it?" Shatilov asked, expecting some new proposal concerning their work in the shop.

"A bottle I've been saving up for my little girl's birthday."

"Some other time, perhaps," suggested Shatilov bashfully.

"No, this time. Such times don't come often."

Shatilov yielded. They had not gone far, however, before he suddenly demanded:

"Yes, but how old is that 'little girl' of yours?"

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen? Then I'd better go home and change!"

And, seizing Permyakov's arm, he swung him around and down the other road.

When they entered the little room Shatilov shared with three other bachelor comrades, Permyakov shook his head commiseratingly. There was barely space enough for the four narrow cots.

Shatilov was soon ready, in a handsome blue suit which set off his sturdy figure to great advantage.

"I can see you were pretty well off, before evacuation," Permyakov remarked approvingly.

"So were we all. Steelmen—that's a profession to take pride in! They made me a foreman,

half a year before the war. I wasn't among the best, it's true. Almost got myself thrown out, once. That was early in the war."

"If you weren't the best, you will be. I can tell the falcon by its flight."

Permyakov's wife and daughter both came to the door. Seeing that her father was not alone, however, the girl quickly slipped away.

The mother, Anna Petrovna, stopped to bolt the door, and when she entered the dining room both men were already seated. Looking attentively into her husband's face, she tried to guess his mood. She had bright, youthful eyes, Shatilov noticed, contrasting strangely with her wrinkled forehead and the stern, aged lines of her firmly compressed lips.

"Well," she asked, smiling, when she saw that her husband's mood was gay, "did you get plucked?"

"I've got half my feathers left," Permyakov replied. "Enough for an old man. There was a tie for first place."

"Between you and Shatilov?" the daughter asked, from the adjoining room.

Shatilov opened his eyes wide, glancing from host to hostess.

"All he talks about these days is you," Anna Petrovna explained. "Shatilov this, Shatilov that—

you ought to hear him! And yet he's never been the sort to lose his head over a man, the way he used to over every girl he saw."

"Mother!" cried the daughter reproachfully, still from the other room.

"Independent. With a mind of her own," Shatilov reflected.

When she came in, he turned to look at her with undisguised curiosity. Her face was fresh and rosy, as though she had just come in from the frost. Her big eyes were a dark hazel.

"So this is Shatilov!" she said. "Why, he doesn't look the least bit like a devil."

"What do you mean--a devil?" demanded Permyakov, flushing uncomfortably.

"Don't you remember, father, what you said after his first heat? 'It won't be an easy job to keep ahead of that young devil.'"

"Olga!" the mother exclaimed, in the same reproachful tone her daughter had used a few minutes before.

They all laughed, and Permyakov shook a threatening finger at the girl.

A big silk lamp shade, hung low over the table, sank the room into a pleasant semidarkness. Through the open door, Shatilov glimpsed a similar shade in the adjoining room.

Noticing his glance, Anna Petrovna explained:

"That's father's blackout. His eyes get tired at work, and he wants the light soft at home. Yes, we should be grateful we've had no need for real blackout here, so far."

"Nor will you, ever," Shatilov declared confidently.

"You're a tankman, aren't you?" asked Olga.

"Yes, but how did you know?"

"It's easy enough to tell you've been in the army, by the way you carry yourself. And as to the rest..." She hesitated, then went on: "Tanks are so often set afire."

Shatilov's hand rose to his scarred cheeks as he replied:

"No, I didn't get this at the front."

The talk turned to war. Shatilov described tank attacks in which he had participated during the war with Finland, and spoke with deep, but suppressed feeling of comrades fallen in battle.

"Now, as an army man," said Anna Petrovna, "can't you tell us when the war will end?"

Her husband and daughter smiled involuntarily at the hope'ful look she turned on their guest. But Shatilov's face was grave; and Olga, looking into his wide, fixed eyes, realized that he no longer saw her, or her mother, or this cozy, softly-lighted room.

"The war has only just begun," he said. "Once we've started beating them, we must keep on to the end, to final victory."

"Let's drink to victory!" Permyakov exclaimed. Opening the sideboard, he produced the promised bottle, while Anna Petrovna quickly set the table.

Shatilov did not answer. His eyes were still fixed, staring into space.

Olga said:

"Come back, Shatilov. You're not here now—you're over there."

He did not at once understand. Only after a bewildered pause did he reply:

"I'm back. Yes, back again. But a person who has seen the things I've seen will always be over there in heart."

Permyakov filled the glasses, and they drank in silence.

At length, Shatilov said:

"Ah, well, we're at the front here too."

"And a front that will never give," Permyakov responded. "With giant works like ours, we can fight and win. Works! I wish you could have seen the miserable heritage the tsars and the capitalists left us in these same Urals! There's only one thing, though: it seems to me we're not doing nearly enough, so far, to be

called real front-line fighters. Don't you feel the same?"

"Yes, I do," Shatilov agreed. "A lot more could be done at a works like this, and with forces like ours. You and I took first place. Well and good; but that's not enough. It's our job to rally everyone—our own shop, the other shops, the works as a whole—to push output and quality up. And instead, if you get down to it, we're still lagging behind No. 1 shop."

Permyakov began to describe the old Urals plants, where his life as a steelman had begun. He was a good narrator, with a gift for bringing out the humorous aspect of his tales; and after a few glasses his speech grew still more fluent, his gestures more eloquent.

"Accidents!" he exclaimed. "They call it an accident, nowadays, if a blast furnace heat breaks through the taphole and the furnace has to be stopped for eight or ten hours—well, twelve, at the most. Why, I remember a case out in Zakamsk when the blast furnace couldn't run for twelve whole days!"

Shatilov pricked up his ears. He had witnessed very few breakdowns or accidents in his life, and stories about them always aroused his interest. Noticing this, Permyakov went on unhurriedly:

"You see, at Zakamsk, in those days, the cars of coke and ore and limestone were pulled to the blast furnace throat by horses."

Shatilov's eyebrows lifted incredulously, but Permyakov repeated:

"Yes, horses. horses. You heard me right. The furnace was right at the foot of the mountain. The mine was up on the mountainside, and they had a wooden bridge straight to the furnace. But there were only two horses trained to drag the cars along the bridge. That was how the trouble started. One of the horses took sick, and the very same day the other made a clumsy turn, right at the furnace throat, and got its tail burnt. All the hair came off—nothing left but a little knout, like an elephant's tail. Well, and, believe it or not, next trip that horse balked at the bridge. Switched its little knout, and wouldn't budge. So the furnace had to be stopped till the sick horse got well and the other got over its fright."

"There you go, father, lecturing on the rise of the iron industry," put in Olga, who had heard the story more than once.

"And you can just sit still and listen," returned her father, with feigned severity. "You won't hear about such things in that institute of yours."

Turning to Shatilov, he added:

"She's a future metallurgist, you know. In her second year at the institute, and leading her class all the time."

"Father!" the girl exclaimed, and once again they all laughed.

Permyakov went on:

"There was another stoppage I remember, funnier still. One night, the power station died, because the pump stopped feeding water to the boilers. Well, they took the pump apart, cleaned it properly, and put it together again. A little water started coming through, but not enough to keep the boiler going. They took it apart again. And all this time, no power for the works. They disconnected the pipe—thought maybe it was clogged. But there was water trickling down it all the time. Then they dragged up another pump, in place of the old one. That didn't help either. The night went by, and most of the next day, and still there was no power. Towards evening, an old fellow from the settlement came around to the boiler room. He watched the work awhile, and grunted a little, and scratched behind his ear, and then he made straight for the director's office.

"How much vodka will you give me," he says, 'if I start the works going again?'

"Now, the old fellow had left the works a good ten years before this happened, but the director still remembered him.

"'How much do you want?' he asked.

"'Enough to last me to Pokrov.'*

"Well, that was too complicated for the director. How many days to Pokrov, and how much could the old man drink a day? But there was no way out!

"'Go ahead,' the director said. 'You'll get your vodka.'

"The old man went off to the pipes. After a while, he came back.

"'You can heat up your boilers,' he says. 'The enemy's in my pocket.'

"And he pulled out--what do you think he pulled out, Vasya?"

Shatilov shrugged.

"A carp. A perfectly ordinary carp. The devil knows how it got into the pipe, out of the pond. Well, anyway, there was a nice fish dish for the old man, to go with his barrel of vodka."

A glowing warmth was spreading through Shatilov's veins. Its sources were many: the wine,

* Pokrov—a Russian Orthodox church holiday, celebrated on October 1 (old style).—*Trans.*

the hot stove, the friendly talk, the bright eyes of the girl across the table. It was a long time since he had been in a real home, since he had eaten home-cooked food, since he had joined in such simple, cheery conversation.

His happy mood lasted through many days to come. It was as though he had found something he had long been seeking. But his spirits fell when the director, seeing his scarred face, forbade him to work at plugging the tapholes. This left the shift without an instructor. Sorrowfully, Shatilov confided his trouble to Permyakov. The elderly steelman hurried straight to the manager's office.

"Vasili Nikolayevich," he told Makarov, "I can replace Shatilov at instructing the first helpers."

"Do you know the method, then?" Makarov asked, greatly surprised.

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you ever use it before?"

"It's a ticklish business. You've got to have a lot of faith in your helper. You don't sleep nights, thinking--suppose the steel bursts through the plug?"

"Well, and now will you sleep?"

"No, I won't," Permyakov sighed regretfully. "I won't sleep now either. But this is no time for

sleep. They're not sleeping on the approaches to Moscow, these days, and it would be a sin for us to hug our pillows."

Deeply touched, Makarov reflected:

"The old man is waking up! He waited so many years for promotion; yet now he's been made a foreman at last, he volunteers himself to work as a furnace helper."

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

At ten o'clock sharp on Saturday evening, Serdyuk stopped in front of Valsky's door. After a swift glance up and down the street, he pressed the bell: two long rings, and one short. Slightly footsteps sounded on the stairs inside, and soon a low voice asked:

"Who's there?"

"The new messenger," Serdyuk replied, also very low.

There was a silence, as though the man behind the door were undecided whether or not to admit the visitor. Then a bolt squeaked, and, after another pause, a chain rattled in its socket. The door swung slowly open, and Serdyuk stepped into the darkness behind it.

"Straight up the stairs," the low voice said.

After a moment's groping, Serdyuk found the banister rail. He climbed the stairs, and opened the door at the top. Bright electric light from the room within flooded the landing.

Valsky, downstairs, locked the door carefully, and turned to look up at his guest. Only after this silent scrutiny did he follow Serdyuk up the stairs and invite him into the study.

Unlike his predecessor, who had always left immediately, thrusting the reports into his pocket without opening them, the new messenger sat down in an armchair by the desk and read the material through attentively. Then, with a glance at the closed door, he asked:

"Can we speak freely? Is there no one else in the house?"

"Not a soul. You can be quite easy," replied Valsky, very civilly. The messenger's bearing inspired respect.

"Is this all you've done in the past week?"

Valsky opened a drawer and produced a sealed packet.

"This is a particularly urgent despatch," he explained. "To be delivered to Herr von Stammer personally, and without delay."

The messenger took the packet. His eyes turned from the seal—a coronet, over a small monogram—to the massive gold ring on Valsky's in-

dex finger. The ring bore the same design as the seal.

Serdyuk tore the envelope open. Valsky sprang up, protesting:

"It's for Herr von Stammer, personally!"

"Don't be alarmed," Serdyuk returned. "Your despatch is in safe hands. I'm not an ordinary messenger. I'm a political inspector."

Valsky sat down again. Try as he might to seem indifferent, he could not help but steal an occasional glance at the inspector's face.

He could detect no change of expression -- neither pleasure nor surprise. Could it be that the inspector already knew these facts? Valsky began to grow nervous.

When he had read the first document, Serdyuk raised heavy, boding eyes to Valsky.

"Are you sure Pivovarov isn't lying?" he asked.

"Positive! Every word of it is true."

Serdyuk read through the second document, in which Pivovarov was recommended as leader of the projected pseudo-partisan detachment. When he had finished, he asked:

"What are your further plans?"

Valsky began to expound his schemes, in wordy detail. At last he had won the inspector's interest!

Serdyuk listened attentively. His border service had taught him many things. He had experienced much himself, and had heard many strange tales from others. But never had he heard or imagined anything to equal this monstrous plot. Valsky aroused his professional curiosity.

"You're an experienced hand, I can see," he said when Valsky fell silent. "Did you carry on wrecking or espionage before the war?"

"No, I'm sorry to say," Valsky admitted shamefacedly. "That was too risky. The Commissariat of Internal Affairs was very efficient."

"What makes you think it's any less efficient now?" asked Serdyuk, with a grim laugh. "Your work is very risky still. Suppose someone rang your bell some day—the regular informers' signal—and it turned out to be a member of the underground?"

"I never even thought of such a thing," Valsky mumbled, dizzy with sudden fear.

Serdyuk glanced at the clock. Ten twenty. Too early. Besides, there was still work to do.

"Your efforts deserve worthy recompense," he said. "Tell me just how many people you have . . . against how many people you have turned in reports. I should like to recommend you for award."

"If I could get back my estate," said Valsky, brightening. "There's a house, and a park, and quite some land. It's excellent soil."

"Soil? That I can promise you definitely," Serdyuk firmly replied.

Readily complying with the inspector's request, Valsky enumerated all the victims—Jews, Communists, active patriots—betrayed to the Gestapo through his agency.

"Let me see your list of informers," was the inspector's next demand.

Somewhat taken aback, Valsky asked:

"Haven't you seen it?"

"I'd like to refresh my memory."

Valsky took a sheet of heavy notepaper from his drawer and handed it across the desk. The inspector thrust it into his pocket, together with the reports and the special packet. Then he produced from another pocket a small, typewritten sheet, with a red star at the top and the letters "T.C." at the bottom.

"Read this aloud" he ordered; and Valsky, taking the leaflet, obediently read:

"The underground Town Committee has condemned Valsky, traitor to the Motherland and senior SD (Gestapo) informer, convicted of assisting in the annihilation of Soviet patriots, to the death penalty, with destruction of his property by fire.

"Sentence was carried out yesterday, at 22:30."

Valsky stopped. The typewritten letters were dancing madly in his brain. His eyes involuntarily sought the clock—and, with a sudden swift movement, he sent the desk lamp crashing to the floor. But Serdyuk had already aimed, and the shot went home.

The glare of three conflagrations hung over the blacked-out town. As yet, only the underground committee knew that the burning buildings were the homes of Gestapo residents. Next day, however, the whole town would learn of the sentences and their execution. Valya Teplova and Sasha would take care of that.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

On Sunday morning, learning from Sasha of his encounter with Krainev, Valya Teplova hastened to the watch repairing shop to inform Serdyuk of this development.

With a friendly nod to Pyrin, Valya passed through the shop to the back room. Serdyuk, greeting her more cordially than usual, immediately handed her the text of a new leaflet. It listed the names of several traitors, Gestapo informers.

"There's going to be a grand to-do, tomorrow!" he said cheerfully, well pleased with the results of the last evening's operation, in which his pupils had even outdone their teacher.

Pyotr, after executing sentence on the resident assigned him, had lain in wait for the genuine messenger, and shot him down in the hallway. Pavel had done better still, making away not only with the resident, but with two informers. Serdyuk, however, had brought in the most valuable information, exposing one of the subtlest methods the Gestapo had yet devised: the organization of pseudo-partisan detachments.

"The history of espionage has never witnessed such an exposure," he went on, when Valya had tucked the leaflet securely away behind the lining of her coat. "Lists of secret agents plastered up in the streets, for the whole town to read! Why, it's complete catastrophe! Who will dare work in their service now? The townsfolk will help us mop up these spics. And we'll be rid of von Stammer, too. He's sure to be removed. Only now we'll have to be doubly careful. They'll be hunting us high and low. The viper's eyes are gone, but its fangs remain."

Someone tapped at the back window. Serdyuk was not expecting any of his group that day. Taking his revolver, he went warily out into the

back hall. A moment later he returned, with Pyotr.

"One of the solo performers in yesterday's concert," he announced, smiling. "Only what brings you here today? Anxious to boast a bit?"

"There's nothing to boast about, Andrei Vasil'yevich," returned Pyotr glumly. "Things are in a bad way at the shop."

What he related of the state of affairs at the machine shop was indeed disturbing. True, the work of restoration was progressing as slowly as ever; but breakages had ceased entirely.

"Krainev's found the right wrench," Pyotr went on, "and he's tightened all the nuts. None of the others ever thought of making us each answer for a definite machine. Yes, he's had plenty of organizing experience, confound him, and he's using it to good advantage. Personal responsibility! It won't be long before we start repairing German tanks, unless I can persuade the men to leave town, or go into hiding. Only how can I persuade them all?"

Serdyuk glanced searchingly at Valya.

"Well," he asked, "what will you tell us now to justify your honest patriot?"

Valya did not answer. To her there seemed to be two Krainevs, separate and distinct: one,

the man she knew and loved; the other, alien, incomprehensible.

His attempt to communicate with her through Sasha, while it made her heart leap, had at the same time filled her with alarm. She could not understand what he might want of her.

"Andrei Vasilyevich," she said finally, after a protracted silence, "Krainev tried to send me a note, by Sasha."

"No? And what did Sasha do?"

"Refused to take it, of course."

"He did right, to avoid a possible trap. I see you've trained the boy well."

"She certainly has," Pyotr confirmed. "And that was no easy task, with Sasha."

"Well, then, Valya"—and again Serdyuk looked searchingly into her eyes—"I want you to bring Krainev here, to the shop, this afternoon."

"To the shop? What for?" Valya asked, entirely at a loss.

"That we'll see when he gets here."

"He won't come," she said. "The burnt child dreads the fire."

"Try, anyway. Agreed?"

"Very well," she answered reluctantly. Serdyuk's request, she knew, was equivalent to a direct command. "Only what am I to say? I can't simply invite him for a social call, can I?"

"No, of course not. Tell him the comrades from the underground would like to have a talk with him."

Valya's eyes opened wide. Suddenly, watching her, Serdyuk smiled. A gay, teasing light danced in his eyes. She had never seen him smile before, and had never suspected that her commander's grim severity could melt into such warm good nature.

"Tell me frankly, absolutely frankly, Valya: do you believe now that he's a traitor?"

She dropped her eyes.

Still smiling, Serdyuk produced from an inner pocket an open envelope with remnants of a broken seal.

"Read this," he said, holding it out to her.

Valya quickly read through Valsky's despatch. For a moment, she could not speak.

"Andrei Vasilyevich," she whispered finally. "Andrei Vasilyevich..."

But she could say no more.

Serdyuk looked down into her glowing eyes with open pleasure.

"May I see too?" asked Pyotr, greatly intrigued.

Serdyuk nodded.

"Where on earth did you get it?" Valya asked, handing Pyotr the despatch. "Part of yesterday's

booty? I wish I could understand how you manage such things! Tell me about it, Andrei Vasilyevich. You've never told me about any of our work."

"Well, this time perhaps I will," Serdyuk replied. "You see, the Gestapo network is organized this way: the town is divided into several sectors. Each sector has a responsible resident, and, under him, several informers who live in that neighbourhood."

As he spoke, Serdyuk sketched rapidly. First he drew a circle—the Gestapo—and blacked it roughly in. Out from the circle, he drew several long lines, in various directions; and from the end of each long line, several short ones. The result was something very much resembling a spider.

"The best thing, of course, would be to strike right here," he explained, bringing the pencil down on the black circle with such force that the lead crumbled at the tip. "But we haven't got the strength for that just yet. It's our job for the future. The near future. For the time being, I decided to slash off the spider's legs." With swift strokes, he cut across each of the long lines. "We struck at the residents, and in that way smashed the whole network. Once a resident has been exposed, the agents working under

him are discarded. They're also considered exposed."

"But how did you discover the residents?"

"That wasn't easy. There was an old school-teacher who wanted to help us, and I persuaded him to report Lyutov to the Gestapo for tearing up the *Donetsky Vestnik* when Sasha was reading it to the workers. That's quite enough for the Gestapo, you know. One such report, and Lyutov was doomed. Well, and, as I expected, my school-teacher was immediately put in contact with the local resident for further work. He brought me the resident's name and address, and instructions on how to ring and what to say, and then he disappeared from town. And once the trick had worked, I repeated it to find the other residents."

"How clever!" cried Valya admiringly.

Pyotr, in the meantime, had finished the despatch. Handing it back to Serdyuk, he said:

"I can't see what Valya's so pleased about. I look at it differently. Krainev did away with Lobachov in order to pass himself off as the saviour of the power station, and..."

"And worm into the Germans' confidence," Valya put in.

"Not worm into their confidence, but earn their confidence, and climb in the world. And he's climbing, right enough—on our backs!"

"You don't know his past," Valya returned heatedly. Her eyes were still glowing, but with anger, now, instead of happiness.

"And you don't know his present. I judge a man by his actions. He's a crafty enemy."

"He's a crafty friend!" cried Valya, in passionate protest, looking to Serdyuk as though for support.

"I don't know Krainev at all," Serdyuk said thoughtfully. "At any rate, if he's a friend, he's not being any too clever about it. I've only seen him once or twice—when he came around to watch the armour steel being rolled. I liked his face. The face of an intelligent, well-read worker. But appearances sometimes deceive. I put full trust in you, Comrade Teplova. Have a talk with him, and find out what he's after. Well, and if Pyotr should turn out to be right, do as your conscience prompts you. Take this, in case of need."

He held out a small revolver. Valya took the weapon. Her face was very grave.

"There's only one thing I ask," said Pyotr. "Make it either today, or next Sunday, when I'm not working. I want to be on hand."

"Today," Serdyuk replied.

Week days were hard; but harder still were Sundays. Then the works was closed, and Krainev,

alone with his thoughts, spent the hours in vain seeking for some outlet from the blind alley in which he found himself trapped. The machine shop was almost ready for operation. Everything now depended on the assembly of the main transmission system. Sergei Petrovich kept away from the assembly site, allowing the workers to drag things out to the best of their ability; but, drag as they might, the job was approaching completion. Breakages had stopped. What would he do, Krainev often wondered, should some worker, defiant of responsibility, wreck a machine? One thing was sure: he would not carry out what he had threatened! Yet if one breakage slipped by unpunished, others would be sure to follow, and the epidemic would begin afresh. This Krainev feared above all else: and to prevent it, he did everything in his power to intimidate the workers. He advanced daily in the Germans' esteem. But his plans for blowing up the power station were no nearer to accomplishment than before. He had been unable to contact the underground, although he clearly sensed its influence in the conduct of the workers. Nor had he been able to find any trace of Teplova. He was sure that Sasha knew where she was staying; but Sasha persistently avoided him. Often, in fits of helpless despair, he would have the impulse to end it

all as he had planned on the square, that day: by shooting down Pfaul—von Wechter—any German who might come in sight. Recalling the power station, however, he would take himself in hand. These fits of passion, constantly suppressed, were very exhausting.

At times, Sergei Petrovich would begin to question himself. Was it not cowardice that kept him from decisive action? The subconscious desire to prolong his life? No. This life that he was leading was a thing of absolutely no value to him.

He was ruled by only one desire: to destroy the power station, to prevent the restoration of the works, to fulfil his duty. Originally, the destruction of the power station had represented to him his duty to the works director, who had sent him to the station; to his evacuated comrades, who had put their trust in him. Gradually, however, this conception broadened. The destruction of the power station, he began to realize, was his sacred duty to the sons and daughters of the Motherland who were laying down their lives here, in the underground struggle; his duty to the fighters who held the Soviet front from the White Sea to the Black. And his own life was such a little thing! With what joy he would have cast it onto the great balance in which the fates

of humanity were being weighed! But senseless, unreasoning sacrifice could not further the cause of the Motherland. His very death must be linked with achievement. It was only this thought that buoyed him up in his appalling situation. He was surrounded by workers, loyal Soviet workers; yet they looked upon him as an enemy - hated him more bitterly than they did the Hitlerites. The Hitlerites were beasts. Krainev, in the workers' eyes, was worse than any beast. He was a crawling reptile. Sergei Petrovich often wondered that no further attempt was made on his life. The thought of such a death struck horror to his heart. He kept within doors after sundown, and in the shop was careful not to pass under the cranes, lest some tool or machine part be "accidentally" dropped on his head. Thus, when a knock sounded at his door, one Sunday afternoon, his first reaction was surprise; his next, alarm.

Tiptoeing down the hall, he bent to peep out at the mail slit. He saw nothing but a warm hat. Then, shifting his gaze too quickly downwards, he found himself staring at a padded jacket. Only after another readjustment did he find the visitor's face. It was Teplova.

He flung the door open. Valya started, but immediately regained her poise.

"Good afternoon, Sergei Petrovich," she said, coming into the hall, as matter-of-factly as though they had last met only the day before, and nothing of any significance had since occurred.

"Good afternoon," Krainev brought out, his breath catching painfully in his throat.

A moment or two passed without further speech, in mutual scrutiny. Valya's glance lingered on the long, narrow scar at Krainev's temple. The hair at his temples had turned grey.

He wore a suit of semi-military cut, well suited to his figure. A revolver hung in a holster at his belt. In this guise, he seemed to Valya an utter stranger.

"I believe you wanted to see me, Sergei Petrovich," she said.

He seized her hand impulsively. His voice trembled as he asked:

"Valya, dear Valya, can you find it in you to trust me?"

"I always trusted you, Sergei Petrovich, and I trust you still."

Only now, in his radiant smile, did Valya recognize the former Krainev.

"Well then," she said, "what did you want to see me about?"

He told her his story — hurriedly, as though afraid she would not have time to hear him out:

incoherently, as though fearing unbelief. His voice came back upon him, like the voice of a stranger, and he sensed its lack of confidence. Watching Valya anxiously, he tried to guess from her face what impression he was making.

Valya listened with grave attention, weighing every word and intonation.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he asked, when he had finished.

"We already knew Lobachov and Pivovarov were traitors," Valya replied. "I came here today, Sergei Petrovich, to put you in contact with the underground."

Again he seized her hand, and pressed it so that she cried out with pain.

"Valya, Valya, can it really be true? I'd lost all hope of being believed. I thought I'd go mad, seeing the hate in people's eyes. Sometimes I've wanted to cry aloud, 'Can't you understand? Can't you see I'm with you, one of you?'"

"I'm so happy, Sergei Petrovich," Valya said, her eyes soft with a tenderness she did not attempt to conceal. "So happy that you've stayed true, that my faith was justified. I had faith in you, you see, all through. When you trust a person, and your trust is deceived, why, you begin doubting everyone on earth—doubting your own self, even."

Her voice rang with such deep and unaffected feeling that Krainev's breath came short.

With a small desk clock in his hand, Krainev strode rapidly through the town, careful to keep at a good distance behind Valya. Again and again, he drove the smile from his lips, only to find, a moment later, that it had once more returned. Far behind, Pyotr and Pavel Prasolov followed, one on each side of the street, never for an instant letting Krainev out of sight. Ordinarily, Sergei Petrovich would unquestionably have noticed that he was being shadowed. Today, he noticed nothing.

Entering the shop, he handed his clock to the man behind the counter. The man pointed to an inner door. In the living room stood Serdyuk, and beside him Valya, glowing with pleasure.

"Hello, then, Comrade Krainev," said Serdyuk, strongly emphasizing the word, "comrade."

"Hello, Comrade. . . ."—Krainev hesitated.

"Serdyuk," Valya prompted.

"So you've come? Not afraid?"

"If I were afraid, I wouldn't have come."

"Well, pull up a chair, and let's hear what you have to say."

Again Sergei Petrovich told his story, more coherently now, and in fuller detail. At last it

had come—what he had begun to despair of. He had found comrades, willing to listen and believe!

“What are you planning to do now?” Serdyuk asked, when the tale was done. “Yes, and what was really your plan all along? To act on your own—a sort of lone hero business?”

“What else could I have done?” Krainev returned. “Circumstances forced me into terrorist action at the very first, and then there was no way out. I decided to drive straight for my aim: worm into the Germans’ confidence, extend my sphere of influence, and find some way of getting access to the power station. I tried to contact you, but it didn’t work out. Now we can make our plans together.”

Valya glanced triumphantly at Serdyuk. “Worm into the Germans’ confidence,” Krainev had said, not, “earn their confidence.” What a shame Pyotr was not there to hear!

Krainev and Serdyuk lit cigarettes.

“It certainly was a riddle you set us,” Serdyuk said, with a wry smile. “I couldn’t make head or tail of it! When you failed to make your talk over the radio, things seemed a little easier to understand. But even so, I must admit, they were far from clear. And then you came down on the machine shop ironshod, and muddled us up again. Valya, here, believed in you all through,

but she was your only champion. We didn't discover the real truth any too easily."

"How did you discover it at all?" Krainev asked.

Serdyuk silently handed him Valsky's packet, with the remnants of sealing wax on the envelope.

Sergei Petrovich read through the despatches. His brows knit concernedly.

"So Pivovarov's still around?" he asked.

"Yes, he's still around." Serdyuk replied. "Valsky's fate will probably shut him up for a while, but he has to be kept in mind. He may strike yet."

"May I ask how you got hold of this despatch?"

Serdyuk smiled.

"Some other time," he said. "That can wait. The question now is, what are we going to do about the machine shop? We had been planning to file the main transmission shaft, so it would snap when the power was turned on. But we can't do that now. It would be the end of you. And do you realize—no, you can't possibly realize, what you mean to us now! The power station—of course, we could organize a raid, and set off the charge in the cable channel. But it would cost many lives. What we must do, absolutely, is prevent the Germans from starting the machine shop."

"We'll prevent it," Krainev declared confidently. "I've planned it all out, only I couldn't have put my plan through, alone. Now.... Now I feel like Antaeus, touching mother earth."

"What is your plan?" Serdyuk asked.

"Wrecking the main transmission motor. The German labour unit answers for that, and none of our people will be involved."

"That's so. But how are we going to do it? The motor's under heavy guard, so far as I know."

"Yes, the motor's under guard, all right. But there's no guard over the lubricating oil."

Serdyuk clapped a hand to his forehead.

"Valya! Call Pyotr in, will you? He's somewhere near."

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Sonnenwald never allowed himself to forget the example of his predecessor, von Stanmer, who had been degraded for the collapse of the information network. To the best of his ability, Sonnenwald strove to maintain his reputation as an "A-1 killer."

Every morning he would make the rounds of his subordinates—a fearful visitor, not only to

the victims under investigation, but to the investigators themselves.

Investigator Schwalbe was a descendant of the one-time German colonists in the Ukraine, recruited into the service of the Gestapo. When Sonnenwald entered his office, Schwalbe was examining a prisoner: a stocky youngster, who stood at ease before the desk, replying calmly to the investigator's questions.

"So you weren't in the Comsomol, and you weren't a Stakhanovite?"

"No."

"What part did you take in public activities?"

"Just about none. Unless you count the store committee. I was on that."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

Schwalbe hesitated, at a loss what more to ask.

There was no change of expression in Sonnenwald's glassy eyes; but Schwalbe clearly sensed his superior's displeasure.

"What do you mean—nothing else?" Sonnenwald demanded, in German. "That's quite enough. If he served on the store committee, he helped the Soviets."

"Sign your name." Schwalbe told the prisoner, pushing the examination record across the desk.

When the record was signed, he pointed to the door.

"Will the guard let me out, or do I need a pass from you?" the boy asked, confident that all was well.

Schwalbe roared with laughter.

"You've just signed your pass to the mine shaft," he replied.

"Me? What harm have I done?" the youngster stammered, turning pale, but with more of surprise in his voice than fear.

Schwalbe commanded:

"Take him away!"

Guards pulled the prisoner out of the room.

"You still work like an amateur," said Sonnewald irritably. "That youngster is guilty, if only because he's young. That kind are liable to join the partisans, or cross the front and become Soviet soldiers. And you don't get enough done. You spend too much time on talk."

Schwalbe stood stiffly at attention through this reprimand. His eyes, of the same rusty colour as his scraggly brows, expressed the most humble servility.

A guard led in an elderly prisoner.

"I'll have to do a little talking, with this one," Schwalbe told his superior apologetically.

Sonnenwald deigned no reply.

"Silvestrov, Ilya Ivanovich?" Schwalbe asked the prisoner, with suave civility.

"That's right."

"Communist?"

"No."

"Stakhanovite? Two days' work in one?"

"Yes, that's so."

"Sit down."

Silvestrov sat down, carefully adjusting his trousers at the knees.

"I'd like you to write an article for the newspaper, about how you became a Stakhanovite," said Schwalbe smoothly. "Not the way you wrote for the *Metallurg*, of course"- and he nodded at the file of newspapers lying on his desk. "You'll write that you were threatened with prison, or exile; that you never really did two quotas in one day; that other people's work was counted as yours, to bring the figures up."

"In other words, you want me to write that I'm not a skilled worker, but a swindler?"

Schwalbe laughed harshly.

"Not a swindler, a victim. A victim of intimidation. Think it over. If the writing's hard on you, we can have someone prepare the article, and all you'll have to do is sign it."

"In other words, sell my soul, sell out my Motherland. How could I look people in the face, if I signed a thing like that?"

Screwing up his eyes, Schwalbe drawled:

"And if the alternative is not to see people at all, any more?"

Silvestrov understood the investigator's threat.

"Whatever the alternative may be, you won't get me to sign," he replied, getting up from his chair.

"Massage!" yelled Schwalbe.

Seizing a whip, he began lashing the prisoner across the face, while the guard buffeted from behind.

Silvestrov dropped to the floor, his face covered with blood.

A trickle of blood approached the edge of the carpet. Sonnewald watched it silently.

The guard dragged Silvestrov to the wall. Schwalbe commanded:

"Bring in the next."

"Your technique is bad," Sonnewald remarked. "When you keep striking at the head, they lose consciousness too fast."

The next prisoner was Lutsenko. Coming in, the old melter immediately noticed the line of blood across the floor, and the rolled-up carpet. Then, glancing about the room, he saw Silve-

strov lying by the wall. He could not suppress a start. He and Silvestrov had lived on the same street for years, and knew one another well.

"Sit down," Schwalbe invited.

Lutsenko's bushy eyebrows lifted slightly. This made the deep furrows on his forehead deeper still.

"Communist?" the investigator asked.

"No. Nonparty."

"Nonparty Bolshevik?"

"No. Simply nonparty."

"Not so very simply," Schwalbe remarked.

He had a cigarette between his teeth, and the words seemed to issue through the little white cylinder, lingering over the desk with the curling smoke. Opening the newspaper file on his desk, he slowly read aloud the text under a photograph which had been ringed around in blue pencil:

"Pensioner Ivan Trofimovich Lutsenko, non-party Bolshevik, has returned to work in the shop, making steel to rout the fascist hordes. So it's not simply nonparty, but Bolshevik?"

"Yes, Bolshevik, it does look like." Lutsenko tranquilly agreed.

"We'll have to hang you," said Schwalbe, equally tranquilly.

Lutsenko turned pale, but did not speak.

In the corner, Silvestrov began to toss and moan. His eyes opened. Sitting up, he raised a hand to his bleeding, mutilated face.

Schwalbe strode across the room to him, whip in hand.

"Well? Now will you sign?"

Silvestrov shook his head. Schwalbe kicked the old man furiously in the face, and he collapsed, again unconscious.

"Take him to the death cell!" Schwalbe commanded—in Russian, so that Lutsenko would understand.

Sonnwald glanced at Lutsenko. The melter sat motionless, his jaws clenched, his forehead beaded with perspiration.

Schwalbe returned to his desk.

"Been living here in town very long?" he asked Lutsenko.

"I was born here," the old man answered, shaping the words with difficulty.

"Light up," said Schwalbe, with sudden civility, laying an open cigarette case before the prisoner.

"I don't smoke," Lutsenko said—and shifted uneasily in his seat, feeling Sonnewald's cold stare on his tobacco-stained moustache.

"Has life any value to you?" asked Schwalbe bluntly, directing a jet of tobacco smoke straight into Lutsenko's face.

"Who wants to die before his time?" the old man returned, with a sidewise glance at the investigator.

"Light up," Schwalbe offered again. Unable to resist temptation, Lutsenko took a cigarette.

The investigator threw a significant glance at his superior. Turning back to the prisoner, he said, in a tone designed to express friendly sympathy:

"I can let you live, and provide you a good living besides, in return for very minor services."

"Of what kind?" Lutsenko asked, drawing the smoke deep into his lungs.

"You see these newspapers on my desk. I have many more the files for several years. Looking them through, I find the names of people who were active supporters of the Soviets. Some doubled and tripled output quotas at work. Some subscribed more than the general average to the state loan. Some worked out new ways of raising productivity. Many of them are still in town. I know. Only I can't find them. I don't know where they're hiding. Now, you're an old-timer here. You know the whole town. I suppose."

Lutsenko nodded, and took another cigarette.

"You could help us find these people. Nose around, learn an address here, another there, and turn them in to us."

"And is that all?" asked Lutsenko, puffing more and more rapidly at his cigarette.

"That's all. We pay well."

"You scum! You yellow dog!" said Lutsenko, very quietly. For the last time, he drew a long, deep breath of tobacco smoke.

"Massage!" yelled Schwalbe, seizing his whip.

Sonnwald got up, signing his subordinate to wait.

"I'll show you how," he said, and took the whip.

The Gestapo building superintendent took his time over the new plumber's registration card. The worker had been sent by the employment bureau, to fill a vacancy at the Gestapo building. Pavel Prasolov, the card said. Born in 1922. Expelled from the Comsomol. Previous employment—fitter at the iron and steel works. Unsuspect.

"The fellow's inexperienced. That's unfortunate," the Hitlerite reflected. "But he's young, and that's a very good thing. Older workers are dangerous. Those two elderly stokers we had only worked when they were watched; and they put the boilers out of commission before they made their getaway. This one's volunteering for the job himself. That's good. There's a startled sort of look on his face. Probably not too clever.

Still better! Not enough brains to do any damage."

Concluding, consequently, that the new plumber was the right man for the job, the Hitlerite laid before him a pledge of secrecy and active assistance to the SD. The worker signed without an instant's hesitation, thus disposing the German still further in his favour.

The boiler room was easily found: down the stairs to the basement, and first door to the right. The room at the left, Pavel noticed, had a sort of wooden latticework instead of a door. It was full of clothing, piled up in disorderly heaps.

Just past the boiler room, the way was barred by an iron grating, reaching from floor to ceiling. Beyond it stretched a long, narrow corridor. Here Hitlerite soldiers were pacing up and down, pausing now and again to glance in at the peep-holes in the cell doors.

The stoker on duty in the boiler room, a tall, lean, one-eyed fellow, with a hideous, fire-scarred face, seemed glad of company. He peppered Pavel with questions for a while, then shifted to the theme of his own adventures. Born in one of the old German settlements in Russia, he had been exiled to other parts, as a kulak, many years before the war. With the coming of the German

troops, he had returned to his native village. The Germans had restored him his former house and property, and appointed him starosta. By means of threats and reprisals, he had squeezed out of the collective farmers a certain amount of grain, which he had turned over to the German army. The Germans had praised him; but his fellow villagers had set his house on fire, and, ablaze from head to foot, he had barely managed to escape. It was in this fire that he had lost his eye. They had turned him down in the Gestapo troops on account of that. What good could he be, half blind, when the partisans baffled men with both eyes in their heads? They had turned him down for the secret service too, on account of his scarred face. Too noticeable, they said. He'd got those scars for helping Germany, but who cared about that? Well, and so he had had to take this job, stoking. It was certainly safe enough. You didn't risk getting killed, down here, the way you did on other work. And it was good pickings, too. If you did your work right, they'd give you some clothes as a bonus, of a Saturday, when the biggest lots of prisoners were taken off to the mine shaft. Last week, he'd gotten an army tunic, a woman's slip, and a pair of shoes. Not bad stuff, either. Lots of blood spots, of course, but no bullet holes. It was pulled off

before the shooting. A pity, though, they wouldn't let him drive the truck out to the shaft. All the Russians refused that job, but he'd never turn it down. Drivers got the best pickings. Well, never mind. He'd wait patiently, and do his work, and some day his time would come.

Pavel listened attentively, putting in a word or a question now and again.

Then he was called away to unload a truck of coal. When he got back, he found an acquaintance in the boiler room: a young fellow named Nikolai, from the works settlement. The stoker went out somewhere, and Nikolai took advantage of his absence to confide in Pavel. Mobilized through the employment bureau as a truck driver, he had thus far been kept busy trucking bricks for a garage the Gestapo was building. But today someone was needed to drive the truck out to the mine. And so he was hiding here, in the boiler room, in the hope of avoiding that job.

Suddenly the door flew open, admitting investigator Schwalbe and the garage manager, a lanky, bowlegged German. The stoker followed.

"What are you hanging around here for?" Schwalbe demanded of Nikolai.

"I came in to warm up. I'm freezing."

True enough. Nikolai was trembling, as though with cold.

"Is the truck ready?"

"Not entirely," Nikolai mumbled, dropping his eyes under Schwalbe's penetrating stare.

"Is it ready, or isn't it?" demanded the investigator, laying a hand on his holster. "If you don't want to drive for us, you'd better say so. You'll go as a passenger."

"All right then, I'll go as a passenger," cried Nikolai, with sudden resolution. "I'll go as a passenger, but I won't drive."

"Have it your own way," said Schwalbe carelessly. He left the room, and a moment later returned with several soldiers.

Nikolai's lips were quivering. His knees were like water. But he kept his head up as he was dragged away.

"Let me drive," said the one-eyed stoker, when the soldiers and their prisoner were gone. "I'll get you out there in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

Schwalbe turned a suspicious glance on the scarred, disfigured face.

"And tumble us into a ditch, before we know it?"

"No, no!" the stoker protested fervently. "Don't you worry about that. I'm a good driver—second category."

"And what about the boilers?"

"The youngster can take care of them"—and the stoker nodded at Pavel. "Nothing so complicated about it."

Schwalbe agreed. The stoker hurried out.

But Schwalbe seemed to be in no hurry. He stood there for some time, looking at Pavel intently. Suddenly, he asked:

"Weren't you in the Comsomol, Prasolov?"

Pavel's heart leaped to his throat, but no sign of alarm escaped him.

"Yes, I was. I got expelled," he replied, looking back unflinchingly into those questioning reddish eyes.

"Seems to have been an awful lot of you expelled," said Schwalbe, with a crooked smile. "Anyone you ask—they all tell the same tale! What were you expelled for?"

"Because I wouldn't volunteer for the army, and I refused to evacuate."

Schwalbe hesitated, considering some further question. To Pavel, he seemed to be meditating whether to send the new plumber to the mine shaft this trip, or next.

Then they heard the iron grating being pushed back, just outside. Schwalbe strode out into the corridor.

Through the open door, Pavel saw the condemned led by. The first was an old man. He

had no hat on. Probably, realizing that he would need it no more, he had given it away. His bruised lips were tightly compressed. One eye was shut, surrounded by a huge blue swelling. The other eye looked out at his guards with undaunted hatred and resolution. Pavel caught his breath in horror. He recognized the prisoner. It was Lutsenko. After the old melter came several men whom Pavel did not know. Then a young woman, stooped like some ancient crone. Then three thin little boys, hand in hand, the eldest protectively leading the two younger brothers, who were evidently twins. One of them kept asking him, "Where are they taking us, Izya? Are they taking us back to mother?" After the children came two women, in identical grey coats. They were very much alike, as mother and daughter may be. The elder turned insane eyes to the door where Pavel stood, as though hoping to escape behind it. After them, two barefoot Red Army men carried a battered, unconscious form. Catching something familiar about the bruised and blackened features, Pavel looked more closely, and recognized Silvestrov.

Then, peering up through the basement window, Pavel watched the prisoners climb into the truck, helping one another up, until they were

all huddled under the tarpaulin tent. Silvestrov was laid on the floor. The guards took their places along the sides, Schwalbe got in beside the driver, and they were off.

"I've got to get out of here, quick!" Pavel told himself, and hurried to the door.

But he stopped short before he reached the threshold. Again he seemed to see Lutsenko's resolute glare, and the crust of blood on Silvestrov's cheeks. They did not fear to die. Yet they had had no orders, no trust to fulfil. They had but acted as conscience dictated. And Pavel had been told by his commander, "Go there and work." He had known where he was going, had known what he must face. What right had he to run away?

Seizing a shovel, Pavel set furiously to work, feeding coal to the furnaces.

Time dragged slowly by.

An empty truck drove into the yard, with a German soldier at the wheel. Huge, heavy bales, brought out through the latticed door opposite the boiler room, were loaded onto the truck. Pavel had seen such bales before, at the railway station, being loaded onto freight cars labelled, "Gifts from the Ukrainians to the great German nation." Now he knew where those gifts came from. He must get this knowledge to Ser-

dyuk, or Teplova, as soon as possible. Let all the people know!

Another truck arrived, bringing new prisoners. Watching them file past the dark boiler room, Pavel shuddered at the thought of what awaited them. There was only one road out of these cells, and that was the road to the mine shaft. Life could be purchased only at such a price as neither Lutsenko, nor Silvestrov, nor any of their fellow victims, of course, could have agreed to pay.

Again a truck in the yard, back from the mine. The guards dumped out the clothing: an old shawl, three children's jackets, Lutsenko's blue overalls, two identical grey coats....

The truck rolled into the garage. A few minutes later, the one-eyed stoker pushed in through the boiler room door, staggering under a load of clothing. Among other things, there were two army tunics, and Silvestrov's bloodstained suit. Sitting down on the bench by the wall, the stoker began to describe his adventures.

"Things turned out bad today," he said. "First of all they took that black and blue one. Dragged him out of the truck, and pulled his clothes off. He came to when they laid him on the snow. Well, they just swung him by the arms and legs, and sent him down the shaft. Then

came the kids. The bigger one in the middle, with his brothers holding onto his hands. At first he didn't understand what was up, only those damned women started squealing, and then he began to beg, 'Don't throw us in there!' Schwalbe shot him, thinking he'd drag the other two down with him. Only he let go their hands, and they got left on top. They screamed just like stuck pigs. I can still hear it. One of the women jumped out and started begging for them: 'Mr. officer, what harm can such children do?' The fool! As if she didn't know whose kids they were! She put herself in front of one of them. Schwalbe let her have it, and she dropped down the shaft. With all her clothes on, too. One of the kids tumbled in with her. but the other ran away, around and around the shaft opening, still screaming. Schwalbe had a hard job catching him. But he tripped him up all right, and threw him down the shaft.

"Then the civilians. The men were all right, did everything just as they were told. Took their clothes off, and got on their knees right by the hole.

"But the mother and daughter had to raise a noise. Got it into their heads to die together, in each other's arms. As if it made any difference!

"The army men—they wouldn't get on their

knees. One of them jumped down the shaft himself, and the other turned around when he got to the edge, and yelled at Schwalbe, 'When our army gets back, they'll avenge us all!' Schwalbe fired at him and missed, and he just stood there laughing. 'You filthy rotter,' he says, 'you can only shoot at people's backs!' And there was such a blaze in his eyes, I was half scared. Suppose he should. . . . Schwalbe fired again, and missed. His hands were shaking. He had to fire a third shot to finish up."

The stoker paused suddenly, glancing furtively around the room, as though eager to complete his tale, yet afraid lest he be overheard. Finally, he moved up close to Pavel and continued, in a half-whisper:

"The last to go was the tall one, with the black eye." This, Pavel realized, must have been Lu'scnko. "He took his things off in the truck, before he got out. He walked along with his head down, swaying, sort of. And going past Schwalbe—whc-ew! He grabbed him by the arm, and jerked him off his feet—and they both flew down the shaft together. The last I saw of Schwalbe were his boots, flashing down the hole. Those were good boots! And he was a good boss, too. German colonist stock, just like me. He used to give me things."

"What about Nikolai?" asked Pavel, clenching his fists to keep from bringing a shovel down over the stoker's head.

"Nikolai?" the stoker repeated. "That's funny! I didn't see him there at all. He must have slipped away, what with all the excitement."

Getting up, he looked into the furnaces, and began shovelling coal.

Pavel poured some water into a rusty tin can, and gulped it down feverishly. His teeth rattled against the metal.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Ivan Pafnutyevich Vorobyov was preparing to go to work. His younger son, Semyon, coming home from the machine shop, found the old man putting up his lunch: two boiled potatoes, and a thin slice of maize bread.

There was really no need of a lunch box, to carry so frugal a meal. It could easily have been stuffed into an overall pocket. But Ivan Pafnutyevich was a man of habit. He had carried this iron box, with the fanciful copper openwork on the lid, for thirty years, and he continued to carry it now. It was far too roomy, of course. The potatoes would roll about as in an empty

bin, crushing the fragile bread into scattered crumbs. Bitterly, he recalled how difficult it had been, only a few short months ago, to squeeze his whole lunch into the box. Something had always had to be carried separately: the bacon, perhaps, or the bottle of milk. . . .

Nodding silently, Semyon began pulling off his overalls.

"Well?" the old man asked. "So you're starting the machine shop tomorrow?"

Semyon hung his head, but did not answer.

"Your uncle still sick?"

"No. Some of the fellows went to see him, and they say he's on his feet again. People do say"—Semyon moved closer, speaking very low—"they do say it was his work, when the drilling machine broke down. There was a nut in the gear box, only nobody knows where it disappeared to. He's a head on his shoulders, Uncle Fyodor has, and plenty of courage to back it. And a good memory, too. He hasn't forgotten what our Soviet rule did for him. So he does his best. If we had more like that, the Germans could never get anything done."

Ivan Pafnutyevich grimaced. He had always cherished a grudge against this brother of his. Fyodor never drank. He had married when Ivan, the elder, was still a bachelor. At the age of

forty-five, when he might have rested content with his foreman's job in the machine shop, he had had the moral courage to go to school together with his own pupils, attending and completing special courses in his trade. Theory, he had wanted, to back his practical experience! He had built himself a house of his own, too, whereas Ivan had always lived in rented rooms.

Had it not been for the bottle, Ivan Pafnutievich might have become a leading engine driver on the Dehaltsevo-Stalino line. Instead, he had remained through all the years a "dinkey" driver at the works, running a shunting locomotive that was just about as old as himself. It had always been with a twinge of envy that he had read his brother's name in the newspapers, among those of the best foremen at the works. Now, too, the high praise he heard of Fyodor pinched the old man's sensitive pride. At the same time, however, it was very pleasant. Clearly, then, he had been mistaken in counting his brother a miserly hoarder, a moneygrubber. No, Fyodor had not sold the Motherland, had not put his goods or his life before his country. And Fyodor had the advantage of his trade and skill. When he got well, he could carry on the good work. But what could the elder brother do—stoker Ivan, who ran his engine boiler now, twelve hours a day, for the

sole purpose of heating up tank car after tank car of mazut?

"So you're preparing for the happy day?" he asked his son maliciously.

"The Germans are preparing, not we," Semyon returned. "They've daubed their swastikas all over the walls. and hung up a huge picture of Hitler."

"They'd do better to hang Hitler up himself, the bitch, instead of his picture. That's what he was born for," said the old man. He fell silent, sunk in dreary reflections.

So many victims! So many shot, so many shut up in concentration camps. And still it went on.

"It's interesting, the way things go," he said, getting up heavily, with the lunch box in his hand. "One son off at the front, smashing the fascists' tanks. And the other son at the works, getting ready to repair those same tanks. It's interesting.... Look here: can't anything really be done?"

"Not a thing," Semyon said glumly. "That cursed engineer knows what he's doing. Every one of us answers for his own machine. Smash it, and you're done 'or, on the spot."

"A fine lot of milksops you've turned out to be, the whole bunch of you. A fine lot! You were all such wonderful talkers, not so long ago.

Meeting-room heroes! A wonder to hear! Where's all your heroism got to now?" demanded Ivan Pafnutych, his eyes fixed sternly on his son.

Semyon turned his face away. He was lying to his father. The shop, he knew, would not start work next day. That afternoon, when all the tests were done, the bearings of the main transmission motor had been oiled; and the oil had contained an admixture of emery dust and steel filings that must inevitably wreck the motor.

"A fine lot," the old man repeated, stumping out of the room. He did not even bother to close the door.

Semyon looked after his father with some concern. Ivan Pafnutych had aged cruelly in the past few months, had grown suddenly stooped and gaunt. His cheeks were hollow, and his eyes sunk deep under his bushy grey brows. Even his moustache drooped, limp and neglected, adding a tinge of bitter bewilderment to the sullen anger in his eyes.

It was still quite early; but the old man had always liked to take his time, strolling leisurely to the works and resting awhile, before the whistle, in the yardmen's waiting room, or "gabble room," as they more often called it. Here, by the hot stove, as the incoming shift began to gather, one could chat comfortably with one's friends, and

hear all the latest news of the works and the world. Nowadays, the waiting room was not a cheerful place. The workers would sit around the stove in funereal silence; and any conversation that did begin would weigh the heart down still more heavily. Yet they continued to gather here, long before their shifts began: to get a little warmth into their bones, after their unheated homes, and draw a little comfort from company.

Walking slowly down the street towards the works, Ivan Pafnutyevich asked himself, over and over:

"Can't anything be done? Not anything?"

He turned in at the gates, where the politsai on duty examined his pass and issued him a token for receipt of the daily bowl of potato peeling soup. Instead of cutting straight across the grounds, Vorobyov took the long way around, past the blast furnace shop and then along the tracks, which here ran side by side with the broad asphalt road.

Along the asphalt pavement, two by two, stood the tanks, awaiting repairs. A big tank column.

Day after day, Ivan Pafnutyevich had made this long detour, to gloat over the twisted turrets, the torn treads, the bullet-pierced armour plate. Today, he did not gloat. His heart was heavy with

the knowledge that tomorrow repairs would begin, and soon tank after tank would go crawling Eastwards, back to the front. And his own son, Semyon, would have a hand in this.

Suddenly the old man slipped and almost fell. There was a puddle of mazut on the asphalt, which he had not noticed until he stepped into it. A thin trail of mazut, he now saw, ran across the ties all along the line. Evidently, an engine had recently passed, pulling a mazut tank car with a leaky cock. The engine must have balked, as they often did because of the low-grade German coal; and while it was standing this puddle had formed.

Ivan Pafnutyevich suddenly clapped a hand to his forehead, and stood so, motionless, for a moment or two. Then he glanced around him, as though afraid someone might have been reading his thoughts, and strode rapidly on along the tracks. At every step, the potatoes in his lunch box rattled back and forth.

For the first time in all his years at the works, he passed the waiting room without looking in, and went straight to his engine, which was standing on a siding near the mazut reservoir. The decrepit little dinkey seemed rooted in the earth. Its wheels were buried under many weeks' accumulation of clinker, and huge icicles hung from every projection. It had not moved since the

occupation; for the Germans used it as a steam boiler, to heat mazut for pouring from tank cars into the reservoir.

Ivan Pafnutyevich relieved the day-shift engine man at once, though it was not yet time. He shovelled in some coal, and poked up the fire so energetically that a sheaf of sparks came flying out at the stack.

"Hey, grandad! Hold your horses!" cried the mazut caretaker anxiously. "You'll have us ablaze in a minute—we've got mazut all around! What's up, anyway? Remembering your travelling days?"

"What's the use of remembering? My travelling days are over now," the old man replied; but his cheerful tone belied the melancholy of his words.

When the firebox was full, Ivan Pafnutyevich took a pick and began hacking away at the frozen piles of clinker.

Some time later, a German sergeant and two privates came by. Watching the old man work, the sergeant laughed.

"*Russische Schwein arbeitet rein.*" he said to the privates; and they guffawed loudly.

The significance of *Schwein* was clear enough, by now. As to *rein*, Vorobyov had not yet encountered the word, and could not guess its meaning. Nodding civilly, however, he said:

"Yes, yes. *Rai, rai.*"*

The soldiers laughed again, and went away.

"*Rai*," the old man muttered, setting to work with redoubled energy. "It'll be *rai* for you, sure enough, tonight."

Growing tired and hungry, he climbed into the cab to eat his lunch. The bread had broken into bits, and he gathered the crumbs up carefully from the bottom of the box.

"I should have put some straw in, to keep the potatoes from rolling," he reflected. "Now, why didn't I think of that before? Oh, well, it doesn't matter. I can do it tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," he repeated aloud, and shook his head.

He drew hot water from the boiler, and sipped it slowly. It stank of oil and lime. Then he ate his potatoes.

It was late evening before he put away his pick and shovel. Now the dinkey was an engine again, and the ice and clinker which had blocked its wheels were piled high at a little distance from the tracks.

Ivan Pafnutyevich looked into the cab to check the steam gauge. The pointer hovered just

* *Rein*—German for clean; *rai*—Russian for paradise.—*Trans.*

short of the danger line. Satisfied, he hurried off to the depot. From an iron box in a corner of the waiting room, he gathered an armful of grease-soaked waste, which he took back with him to his engine and piled up neatly in the cab.

"What are you up to, with all that junk?" asked the mazut caretaker. "Building yourself a nest in the cab?"

"That's right. A nest. So my old bones will rest softer in the next world," he answered testily.

The fire was roaring steadily. Ivan Pafnut'yevich added more and more coal. After a while he got out and moved around the engine, pouring grease into the axle boxes.

The mazut caretaker emptied the tank car and brought up another. Then he came up to the cab again, wiping his greasy hands with a bunch of waste.

"I'll go take a nap in the gabble room, while there's nothing to do," he said. "Call me when the mazut's hot enough."

Some time past midnight, Ivan Pafnut'yevich felt the tank car. It was very hot. He uncoupled it and hurried back to his cab.

Taking his place at the controls, he reached out automatically for the whistle cord, but caught

himself in time and pulled his hand back with a whispered curse. With beating heart, he opened the throttle.

The dinkey did not move.

"Failure?" flashed through the old man's mind. Desperately, he threw the throttle open wide.

The dinkey jerked violently, and was off.

For the first time in his life, Ivan Pafnutievich had started on a journey without blowing his whistle.

He stopped the engine at the junction, and got out to switch the point. Then he steamed back to the tank car, and coupled it to his engine.

Slowly, the dinkey dragged the car along the rusty, disused tracks.

When he came alongside the asphalt road, Ivan Pafnutievich shut the throttle, jumped down, and threw the cock of the tank car open. The hot mazut came pouring out. Spreading smoothly over the asphalt pavement, it soon reached the treads of the nearest tanks.

The old man climbed back into his cab, and took the dinkey slowly on down the whole length of the tank column. As the last tanks came opposite, the stream of mazut dwindled and stopped. The car was empty.

Reversing the engine, he started on the return trip.

The time was come. He seized a handful of waste, thrust it into the firebox for an instant, and cast it, flaming, back upon the heap in the corner of the cab. It caught at once. Now he began to scatter the burning stuff out over the road.

His hands were burnt to the bone, his beard and eyebrows gone; but still he continued to throw the burning waste from the slowly moving dinkey, with no thought but to reach the other end of the tank column before anyone could stop him.

Behind him, the mazut he had poured over the road was already afire: a broad river of flame, lighting up the dead shop buildings, the smokeless stacks.

Shouts and whistles sounded at the works gates. Shots were fired. Politsais and German soldiers came running towards the conflagration.

But a series of violent explosions drove them back. There was still petrol in the tanks, and, in some of them, shells and cartridges, which the raging fire had heated to bursting point.

Ivan Pafnutyevich passed the end of the tank column. Thrusting his head out at the cab window, he looked back. The tanks had caught. His task was done. He threw the throttle open to the limit.

Pushing the empty car before it, the dinkey sped along the tracks.

The old man closed his eyes, and turned his scorched face to the cooling wind.

For a moment he dreamed he was driving his engine on some ordinary trip, in ordinary times. But the dream was cut rudely short.

The tank car jerked the buffer from the tracks, and crashed into the works wall. The driver's head banged against the firebox. He lost consciousness.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Early next morning Krainev was summoned to von Wechter's office. Even outside the door, Sergi Petrovich could hear the baron's voice, raised in frantic abuse. Coming in, he found Smakovsky, pale and trembling, facing his infuriated employer. Beside von Wechter at the desk sat another German, in Gestapo uniform, adorned with innumerable insignia. This German's frosty eyes swept Krainev's face as he entered, but so swiftly that Krainev could make nothing of them.

"You should to hang," von Wechter shouted, shaking an accusing finger at Smakovsky. "The partisan iss burn the tanks, und you are sleep in bed. You are help him burn. *Esel!* Ass! Get out! *Schneller!* Out!" He pointed to the door.

Smakovsky left. Von Wechter transferred his wrath to Krainev.

"What you are think in your head?" he demanded. "Burnt tanks how will you repair?"

"What I think?" replied Krainev tranquilly "I think it was foolish to leave the tanks unguarded."

Without waiting to be asked, he sat down in one of the armchairs before the desk.

"Und why are you not guard them?" von Wechter roared.

"Mc? I'm the manager of the machine shop. My work is progressing splendidly. We start the shop this afternoon."

Krainev leaned back in his chair contentedly. Now he was perfectly willing to start the shop. It would take a week, at least, before all the burnt tanks could be cleared off the road. Through the window opposite, he saw two tractors crawling across the works territory, with the charred remnants of a tank in tow.

Von Wechter turned to the Gestapo man, and they began to talk quietly in German. Krainev, waiting, let his eyes wander over the desk in front of him. Everything here remained as he had always known it: the desk set, with inkwells in the shape of teeming ladles; the miniature ingot mould for pens and pencils; the bronze steelman beside it. Even the carafe of drinking water on the

little table beside the desk was the same from which Dubenko had so often poured himself a glass during the general morning reports.

Von Wechter's voice brought Krainev back, with a start, to the present day.

"It iss one question I should ask from you," von Wechter said. "Luffed you fery much your son?"

"Very," Krainev replied, wondering what would come next.

"Why you did sent him in the Urals?"

"How could I keep the child in danger here? There were air raids all the time, and people thought there would be heavy fighting for the town. And the Urals are so near! The German troops will soon be there. The Urals will surrender without battle. When it's all over I can go and fetch him."

"Why you are leave your wife?" von Wechter asked. "She iss our friend. She will to help Germany."

"I discovered she was deceiving me," said Krainev, well pleased with himself for finding the right reply.

The Germans consulted again. Then von Wechter announced pompously:

"You are appoint for the chief from the Russian guards from the whole works. Now must

your head to answer for all. You understand? For all."

"I understand," Krainev returned, suppressing deep below the surface the swelling joy that filled his heart. "I'll do everything in my ability. But if I'm to take the job I must inspect the power station, not later than tomorrow."

At the words, "power station," the German in Gestapo uniform stiffened suddenly and turned his eyes on Krainev in a heavy stare. Again Sergei Petrovich failed to grasp the expression of those frosty eyes; but a chill ran down his spine.

"Why you are interest in the station? The station iss gut guard."

"Once I answer for everything, I have to see whom you have working there."

Von Wechter spoke to the Gestapo man in German.

Krainev sat smoking quietly, as though the question did not interest him particularly.

"Fery gut," von Wechter declared, after a brief consultation. "The chief from the Gestapo permits for you tomorrow to visit the station."

Krainev's eyes were shining as he came out of the administration building. It is often harder for a man to conceal joy than sorrow. And why should Krainev suppress his rejoicing? Did he not have the right to it? Had he not earned that right?

How often he had thought about the day when he should succeed in entering the power station! And now that day was to be tomorrow!

Tomorrow he would achieve his most fervent desire, his most cherished hope. His heart beat high in that peculiar elation, not to be compared with ordinary joys, which comes with the fulfilment of exalted dreams. And memory returned him to the day, the happiest of his life, when he had first experienced this elation.

He had gone to Moscow, to participate in a conference of Stakhanovites. It had long been his dream to visit the capital, to set foot on the Red Square, to see, if only for an instant, the greatest of all men.

And at last he had found himself walking uphill, past the huge museum, with the domes of St. Vasili's and the spires of the Kremlin towers coming into sight ahead. Then the familiar, long-awaited scene had opened before him. He had had to stop to catch his breath. How often had he seen this historic square, in photographs, on the cinema screen, in his mind's eye! Now he saw it in reality. Now he could drink in its beauty to his heart's content. He had stood motionless, admiring the Kremlin walls, the rows of slender spruces, the severe simplicity of the mausoleum.

He had wanted to touch it all; to carry some

part of it, be it only a few spruce needles, away with him to the Donbas....

He was striding down the ties past the burnt tanks; but he did not see them.

What he saw was a roomy hall in one of the Kremlin palaces; the speaker's stand in that hall; and, behind the stand, the people's leader: grand in his simplicity, and simple in his grandeur. It was this vision that Sergei Krainev had carried away in his heart, back to the Donbas.

But all this was memory. It was not long before Krainev was brought back forcibly to reality, to the present day. From a lamppost at the edge of the road hung the charred body of the old engine driver, Ivan Pafnutyevich Vorobyov. The old man's face was turned towards the column of burnt tanks, as though in wonder at this thing he had accomplished.

Only with difficulty did Krainev control the impulse to bare his head and bow in reverence before this courageous man. Clenching his teeth, he hurried on.

When he reached his office, he sent at once for Pyotr Prasolov. Pyotr came in, glum and inimical as always.

"Bring me a fuse and detonators tonight, at my house," Krainev ordered. "The power station will go up in the air tomorrow morning."

Prasolov's face did not clear.

"I need more details than that," he said.

Sorely piqued by his suspicion, Krainev exclaimed:

"That's all. Carry out your orders."

It was late at night when Valya knocked. Looking into her face, Sergei Petrovich cried out in horror. Her hair was clipped short, and there was a huge red blister over her upper lip.

"What's happened, Valya?" he asked, turning her to face the moonlight.

Gently, she removed his hand.

"Careful!" she said, and tried to smile, but immediately bit her lip in pain.

From an inner pocket of her jacket, she produced a fuse and detonators, which she laid down on the window sill.

"What's happened, Valya? Who did that to you?"

"Nothing, Sergei Petrovich. I did it myself. The Germans pester every girl they see. So I heated up a curling iron and put it to my lip. Well, and I made it a little too hot. But that doesn't matter. It'll heal, I suppose, by the time our army gets back. And in the meantime, I'm safe. No one will look twice at such a scarecrow."

They sat down, side by side, and for a long

time neither spoke. Krainev was thinking of his plans for the morning. Valya was thinking of him. On the window sill, bathed in silvery moonlight, lay the fuse and detonators.

"Such a beautiful night!" said Krainev softly. "The sort of night for wandering out of doors, for talking, dreaming."

"Dreaming!" Valya returned, with carssing mockery. "I'd never take you for a dreamer. They're always so helpless, so impractical. You're not that kind. You're a man of action."

"Ah, but you're wrong there, Valya," he said eagerly. "There are all kinds of dreamers. Some just dream their dreams, and rest content with that. But others—the greater their dreams, the more impatient they grow to make those dreams reality. Take the great inventors, the men who revolutionize industry. Dreamers, every one. It's dreamers, Valya, that lead humanity's advance. The Communists—why, they're the world's most active dreamers. They're remaking the world in accordance with their teachings, which many have called a dream."

Valya sat listening attentively. As always when Krainev was near, a glowing happiness filled her heart.

Then, suddenly, she remembered what was to take place next morning.

Next morning he must die. How could he think and speak of other things? Surely he did not hope to come out of it alive? Valya's eyes turned to the detonators on the window sill. One hundred seconds from ignition to explosion.

Sergei Petrovich caught her glance, and understood what she was thinking.

"Valya," he said, "take this and give it to Serdyuk."

"What is it?" she asked softly.

"Read it."

She went to the window, and, in the bright moonlight, read his note:

"To the secretary of the Party bureau.

"I am setting out to fulfil my duty. Let me be counted as a Communist.

Sergei Krainev"

Valya folded the note carefully and hid it in her bosom. A tear rolled down her cheek, glistening in the silvery light.

Krainev came to her side. Turning quickly, she threw her arms around him, as though never to let him go.

"Sergei Petrovich!" she whispered. "My dear, my dear! How dreadful it all is!"

She could no longer restrain the choking sobs.

Krainev drew her gently away from the window, and wiped away her tears, as though she were a child. Gradually, her sobbing ceased. She looked up at him, deep into his eyes, and kissed him.

His heart was heavy. Some deep instinct kept his eyes turned from the clock. Once he left the house, he knew, an hour would be his utmost lease of life.

The visit to the power station had been set for seven.

The whistle blew.

Again Valya embraced him, saying:

"It's time, Sergei Petrovich."

Krainev went to the window.

A grey winter sky spread coldly over the earth. Far off at the horizon, dawn was breaking, a faint strip of rose and yellow. This, it occurred to Krainev, was the last dawn he would ever see. He stood looking out for a while, then took the fuse and detonators and strode out of the room.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

Dmitryuk did not mind the biting frost. What he minded was his enormous sheepskin coat. Wherever he went to enquire about work, he would be offered one and the same job: as a night watch-

man. And all on account of that coat, he was quite sure! Eventually, borrowing a shoemaker's knife, he sliced off a foot or more of sheepskin from the skirts, and about as much again from the tremendous collar. Part of these scraps went to make a pair of patch pockets, which the old man sewed to the coat—not beautifully, perhaps, but durably. Passing dark store windows, now, he would often stop to admire himself in the glass. True, his creation could not be said to resemble any hitherto known form of winter apparel; but that did not bother grandfather Dmitryuk.

He kept away from Makarov, waiting with native tact until the new shop manager should have had time to take the work in hand. In the meantime, he was far from idle, feeling called upon, as the only member of the Grandfather Frost brigade who was not yet at work, to plunge into new cares for the welfare of the evacuated women and children. He became an accustomed visitor at the nurseries where his tiniest protégés spent the hours when their mothers were at work; at the housing board; at the hospital; at the works personnel department, and, most frequently of all, at the office of the works committee of the steelmen's union. Through the works committee, he obtained a large, sunny room for Pakhomova and Maria Matviyenko,

and arranged that they work in different shifts, so that one could always be at home. Life at once became easier for these two women and their little ones.

A large communal home had recently been organized, providing lodging for many of the evacuated families whose husbands and fathers were at the front. Here, as in the open-hearth shop at home, Dmitryuk assumed the rights and duties of inspection, scolding the staff and grumbling at the superintendent when anything went wrong. He looked in daily at the communal kindergarten, and the children would always drop their toys to flock around their beloved Grandfather Frost.

Dmitryuk knew no fairy tales. There had been no one to tell them to him, in the distant days of his wretched childhood. To please the children, however, the old man searched out somewhere a tattered volume of Russian folk tales. Every evening he would read one of these stories, in order next day to relate it in the kindergarten. But still his conscience gave him no peace. What sort of Grandfather Frost was he? Grandfather Frost was a bringer of gifts, whereas all he brought the children were a few old tales!

The last few days before New Year's, Dmitryuk spent all his evenings away from home. Not

until ten or eleven o'clock would he turn up, tired, but cheerful.

"Our old man's gone back to his courting days," the neighbours teased. "Who is she, grandad?"

The children's tree, that New Year's, was of such height and beauty as they had never seen at home, in the Donbas steppes. As they were dancing around it, Grandfather Frost and Shatilov marched suddenly in, dragging a sack along the floor behind them. It was a big sack, and heavy: chock full of something bumpy and uneven. The old man untied the fastenings; and out tumbled a veritable mountain of bright-coloured wooden blocks. Shouting with pleasure, the children threw themselves upon these playthings. Soon a castle grew up beneath the tree. Its walls were rather mottled, true enough; but who was the worse for that?

In his many cares and projects, major and minor, Dmitryuk often turned for assistance to Ludmilla Ivanovna Vershinina, a fair-haired woman with dark, tired eyes—chairman of the Board set up by the works trade union committee to help evacuees. Vershinina, in turn, noticing the old man's indefatigable will to be doing, entrusted him with several tasks on behalf of the Board. These he undertook willingly, and

carried out with his usual thoroughness. In the end, realizing that she could find no better assistant, Vershinina offered him a paid position on her staff. The old man cast a wistful glance at the smokestacks outside the window, marking the shops where he longed to be; but, after duly weighing the circumstances, he accepted the offer.

This immediately extended the range of his activities. All complaints received by the Board would be turned over to Dmitryuk, and he would go riding about town, investigating and putting to rights. At first he rather wondered that the trade union committee should have so luxurious a car at its disposal. Later, however, getting into conversation with the driver, he discovered that the car was the director's. From the driver, too, he learned that Ludmilla Ivanovna Vershinina was the director's wife, and that she worked on the Board, not as a paid employee, but as a volunteer. The old man grunted, to hide his embarrassment. He had often spoken harshly of the director in discussions with Vershinina, heatedly demanding one or another improvement in conditions for evacuees. In many such cases, as chairman of the Board, she had telephoned Rotov immediately and urged the speedy satisfaction of Dmitryuk's demands. But no one could have guessed, from these talks, that she was so much

as on bowing terms with the director in private life.

Dmitryuk's embarrassment soon passed. Ludmilla Ivanovna might be the director's wife; but what had that to do with work?

Though the old man found his new duties absorbingly interesting, he was always glad of his weekly free day. This he invariably spent at the works, drinking in the atmosphere of his beloved furnaces. Getting up earlier than usual, and belting himself into his sheepskin coat, he would set out for the works on time to enter the gates with the whistle for the morning shift.

Before going on to the shops, however, he would pause to examine the heaps of unclaimed letters pigeonholed alphabetically in a special box beside the pass desk. Reading the addresses was a complicated business. Perching a pair of spectacles at the very tip of his nose, he would proceed to hold up every envelope at arm's length and squint at it painfully over the spectacle rims.

Finding a letter addressed to any of his friends or acquaintances (and these were now very many), Dmitryuk would open it at once and read it through, without the slightest qualms of conscience. He had his own views on the privacy of correspondence. Who could tell what such

a letter might contain? News of wounds, perhaps, or news of death. How could one simply thrust a thing like that into the hands of the addressee?

When the news was bad, Dmitryuk would break it as gently and kindly as he could, and offer what consolation was in his power. How this gruff old man found such tender, soothing words, no one could say; but many a woman had sobbed out her tears, of sorrow or of joy, on his sympathetic breast.

Until delivery, the letters would be hidden away in an inner pocket of Dmitryuk's jacket. In the same pocket, he kept his cherished memorandum book a worn clothbound notebook, puffy and misshapen with the endless extra sheets sewn in among its pages. This was Dmitryuk's greatest treasure, the object of his constant care. Several times a day, he would feel the pocket to make sure that all was safe. Had he lost the book, its finder could never have made head or tail of its hieroglyphic entries. They made sense only to their author, who knew them to comprise all the principal measurements of the open-hearth furnaces in the Donbas shop where he had worked so many years. Since the fire which had destroyed part of the works archives, these entries had become doubly precious. They would be invaluable when the time came to rebuild the

furnaces; and it never entered Dmitryuk's mind to doubt that he would have a hand in that rebuilding. Were not his legs still steady, his eyesight clear, his memory unfailing? Often, when he could not sleep at night, he would repeat to himself the figures for each of the furnaces, then get out of bed and check them with his book. Never once, as yet, had he slipped up. Still, it made his mind easier to have the written record.

One day, among the unclaimed letters, the old man found one bearing several names, listed one below the other: Shatilov, Krainev, Dmitryuk, Nikitenko, Buroi.

This was the first time in all the months of war that Dmitryuk had seen his own name on an envelope. He opened the letter with trembling hands, tearing the paper in his hurry, and immediately sought the signature. Matviyenko! Dmitryuk drew a sharp breath, and began reading eagerly. Five minutes later, forgetful of his lameness, he was hurrying across the works territory to the open-hearth building. Unfortunately, however, none of those listed on the envelope were working in the morning shift that day, and the old man was compelled to wait for several hours.

At a few minutes to three, the incoming shift assembled for the usual brief meeting before

starting work. With Makarov's permission, Dmitryuk got up to address the steelmen. He read them Matviyenko's letter, which he knew almost by heart, so many times had he read it through in the hours of waiting.

"Dear fellow countrymen," Matviyenko began. "I'm writing this in intermissions between enemy shells. We haven't retreated far. The whistle of our works used to be heard here. And we're not letting that Hitler rabble advance another step. The Alchevsk works is behind us. The last of the Donbas works!"

At this point Dmitryuk pulled out a handkerchief and blew his nose violently. After a pause, he read on:

"The Alchevsk works is alive! A red glow hangs over it by night. But before us lies the steppe, and that's a dreadful thing to see! Remember how it used to glitter, with a million lights? Now it's dead and dark as the grave, except for the passing glare of explosions. And so it will remain, until the Hitlerites are gone. They will never succeed in lighting up our steppes. The fig'it goes on behind the lines as well as at the front. Our Soviet patriots prevent the restoration of mines and works. That we know from the comrades who make their way to us across the lines, escaping from German bond-

age. Every day there are more of these. They bring news of our works, too. The comrades there smash machines, and set fire to the tanks that are brought in for repairs. They're fighting bitterly, laying down their lives for victory. Bitterly as we are fighting at the front.

"We stand firm on this last bit of Donbas soil. We know that all the Donbas will be ours once more. We've counterattacked again and again, drowning the enemy in their own blood. And you, comrades—do you work as we are fighting? We'll meet again, some day, and render one another account. May none of us be ashamed to look his comrades in the eye.

"We ask only one thing: tanks. More tanks, comrades!"

Again Dmitryuk pulled out his handkerchief.

"What answer will we send Mikhail Trofimovich?" he asked, breaking the hush that filled the room.

"Here's what we'll answer," said Shatilov. "Dear Mikhail Trofimovich! Your fellow countrymen from the Donbas..."

"And from the Urals," put in Permyakov. "We're all fellow countrymen, wherever we happen to come from. It's all one land, our land."

"And from the Dnieper," came a voice from the far corner.

"... will earn the right to be called front-line fighters,'" Shatilov continued. "Only—let's not mention any figures yet. We've done too little. Isn't that so, comrades?"

"Right!" the steelmen responded.

"But not all of us have earned that right today.' And we'll write him all about how Vasili Buroi refused to come to work for a whole month, because he was too proud to come on as a furnace helper. And even now, he's not working his best. Thinks that can wait till he's made a melter again! Yes, that's how we'll write it."

The whistle blew. Dmitryuk folded the letter and handed it to Shatilov.

Buroi got up, flushed as though he had been looking in at an open furnace door, and said:

"I ask only one thing, comrades. Only one thing." Buroi had never been known to ask before. He had always demanded. "Leave me out this time. And next time you'll have nothing had to write about me. I promise that."

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

The speaker's voice carried to every corner of the big, crowded hall. His report was drawing to its close. He had already spoken of the achieve-

ments of the works, of the successful fulfilment of war orders; had praised the leading shops, and reproached the shops which lagged behind; had mentioned outstanding workers and administrators, and informed the meeting as to the percentage of the works personnel participating in socialist emulation and attending classes in Marxist-Leninist theory.

The works plan had been overfulfilled, in all spheres of production, and a note of quiet satisfaction sounded in the speaker's voice. He was the secretary of the works Party committee, reporting to the general Party meeting on the year's results. An old-timer at the works, he faced his audience with accustomed ease. There was nothing to distinguish this meeting from the last, or from the one before that - except, perhaps, that there were many new faces in the hall.

The director, sitting beside the chairman in the presidium, looked through the notes sent up from the hall during the report. These were numerous, chiefly requests for the floor.

The first to speak was Permyakov, leading melter of No. 2 open-hearth shop and one of the most respected men at the works.

Permyakov had never before spoken at general meetings. He stood silent for some time,

twisting his hat uncomfortably, at a loss what to do with it. At length, he put it down on the speaker's stand and, drawing a deep breath, began gruffly:

"I used to be satisfied with a hundred and two, a hundred and three per cent of quota. Last month I jumped to a hundred and fifteen. And you know how hard every per cent comes, in the open-hearth. You can't just push your furnace for all you're worth, or you're liable to have your steel on the floor. It's not like a turner's job, where you can think up some new appliance and double your quota without half trying."

A buzz of protest rose among the machine shop workers.

"The other man's job is always easier!" one of them shouted.

The chairman rang his bell for order. Without waiting for the hubbub to die down, Permyakov continued.

"How did I come to jump like that, from a hundred and two to a hundred and fifteen? I'll tell you how. I got angry. Yes, angry at the Fritzes—that's one thing; and angry at myself—that's another. And I can tell you, it's a whole-some anger: it gave us an extra hundred tons of steel, right off."

"Why don't you get angrier, then, and make it five hundred tons?" shouted the same voice as before.

"I'll make it a thousand." Permyakov returned, with sudden heat. "But I look around me, and I don't see that wholesome anger in our comrades. And worst of all, I don't hear it in our secretary's report. Yet he should be angry. Angry at us, and first and foremost at himself. He paints a pretty picture for us: everything running just so! What are you so pleased about, comrade secretary? Tell us, if you can! That we've increased output one and a half per cent? Is that the way they chased the Fritzes, on the approaches to Moscow? Do you think they had a quota, so and so many kilometres a day? No, they drove ahead just as long as their legs would carry them, as long as they could lug their rifles. And we sit here and smirk because we've fulfilled our quota. Heroes! We're no heroes."

He swung his arm down in a disgusted gesture. His hat fell to the floor, but he did not notice it.

"New people have come here to us," he continued, "from the Dnieper and the Donbas. And to my shame, I can't help but see: they put more heart in the work than we do. Why? Our skill is the same as theirs: but there's one

great difference. We here have only heard about the war, and they—they've seen it. The war has scared them, and it hasn't us—not yet. Not all of us are afraid. Not all of us are angry. And it's a good anger. It comes of love. Love for our Motherland, and our Party, and our people. No, comrade secretary, I can't see either, in your report: love, or anger."

Permyakov broke off. Missing his hat, he looked around for it, and bent to pick it up. Then, his lips set in a stern line, he went back through the hall to his seat.

A hush fell over the meeting. It was some time before the chairman realized that the next speaker should be called.

When he called the next name, however, no one responded. He called the next after that, and again no one came forward.

The chairman glanced helplessly at the secretary of the Party committee. The secretary met his glance with a look of angry perplexity.

Shatilov, bashful because Olga sat beside him, had not been intending to speak. But Permyakov's words so stirred him that, springing to his feet, he hurried forward. Only on the platform steps did he remember to ask the chairman for the floor. Looking silently into the melter's fire-scarred face, the chairman nodded.

'Comrades!' Shatilov began loudly. "The old man is right. There's a difference between hearing about the war, and seeing it. Out in the Donbas it was the same way. We didn't get going full swing from the very start. But when the first bomb fell, when we saw our comrades killed and wounded—then we threw ourselves into the work like mad. When you're on fire inside, when your heart is blazing, the heat of the furnace can never bother you.

"A letter came from the front today, from a comrade of ours, Matviyenko. He was secretary of the Party bureau in our shop. It's just a short note, but I'd like you all to hear it."

Shatilov produced the letter from his jacket pocket, unfolded it carefully, and read it to the meeting.

"What can one add to that letter?" he went on, when he had finished. "Only this: there's no rear line in this war. We're not in the rear. We can't be. The front is out there, and the front is right here. And the front is beyond the battlegrounds, too: an underground, partisan front, behind the enemy lines. Three fronts. Our whole Motherland, from border to border— one unbroken front. Our men out there are fighting like real workers, and it's up to us to work the way they fight. It wasn't to rest that we came

here, along tracks that were red with blood—though it's true there are some among us who stay away from the works, looking for easier jobs. We came here, retreated here, to launch our offensive, yes, our offensive, from here. It's hard to stay in the East, when your hands itch to be holding a rifle. But such is our Party's will. We're on the firing line here too. Then what answer shall we send to our comrades at the front? Will we work as they are fighting?"

A murmur rose, from end to end of the hall:
"We will!"

"And if we will," Shatilov concluded, "we must be more demanding—demanding on ourselves, on our comrades, on our leaders and administrators."

He left the platform.

And again, when the chairman called on those who had sent up requests for the floor, no one responded. Others, instead, raised their hands and came forward—came to demand. They demanded gas for the furnaces, hot ingots for the blooming mill, more metal for the special shops. They demanded reports and lectures, regular contact with comrades at the front, discussions of the work of individual Party members.

Makarov came forward. He had long been awaiting this meeting, with the idea of calling

Rotov to account for his treatment of personnel and his general style of administration. After Permyakov, Shatilov, and the succeeding speakers, however, he felt that, comparatively, the points he had been preparing to bring up were rather insignificant.

"I'd like to ask the secretary of the Party organization," he said, half turning to face the presidium, "what he's reporting to this meeting on: production work, or Party work?"

The secretary of the Party committee shrugged.

"Is this a question, or your manner of discussion?" he enquired.

"A question, preliminary to discussion," Makarov replied, and paused in an attitude of silent waiting.

"Answer the question, Ivan Gavrilovich," said the chairman, politely, but firmly. "Since the comrade asks, he must be answered. We can't stick to formalities, dividing questions from discussion."

The secretary of the Party committee got up.

"Our work is judged by its results," he explained condescendingly. "If production goes well, that means Party work is up to the mark."

"And what makes you think production is going well?" Makarov returned. "All the comrades who have spoken here say they could do

much better than they're doing now. If they could work better, that means they're working badly. And that means you're working badly too. Listening to your report, I didn't hear a word about any of the really basic things I wanted to know. You spoke as a works director might speak at some holiday meeting, reporting accomplishments and allowing himself, for the moment, to forget about shortcomings. As to actual Party work, you told us nothing about it at all."

Looking out over the meeting, Makarov noticed Permyakov, listening with strained attention, his palm cupped over his ear. Nearby, Shatilov's eyes were shining. Makarov continued:

"I was once secretary of a Party organization myself. It was a small organization, but I managed to make some pretty big mistakes. When the shop worked well, I strutted around as proud as a peacock. That was my work, don't you see! But when things went badly, I pointed at the administration. That was their work, not mine! My mistake was pointed out to me, and I realized how wrong I had been. Your mistake, comrade secretary, is of the same order. The works fulfills its plan, yes. Because our Soviet workers can't fall down on plan, knowing a war is on to decide the fate of the world's first Socialist state. But what have we, the works

Party organization, done to further production? Think it over, and you'll find that we've done very little. Many of the Communists present here are simply rank and filers in their shops. Yet it's their duty as Party members to be in the lead, in the vanguard—to rally the rest, as Permyakov and Shatilov rally the steelmen in their shop. We all know their slogan: Make No. 2 open-hearth shop the works' first shop! Not only our Party members—our Party secretary does nothing to rally forces for increased production. Why did I hear nothing in your report about improved equipment? Or about the new automatic devices that were being introduced before the war? They've been dropped entirely since the war began. Why do you smooth over the question of studies, the question of candidate members whose probation period has dragged beyond all limits? You think production is going well; and in view of that you allow yourself to work badly. That's how it looks to me. And to you, comrade secretary?"

A stir passed through the hall, but Makarov could not guess its nature: agreement, or disapproval.

The secretary of the Party committee sprang to his feet, demanding:

"What is this— an accusation?"

"Yes, an accusation of bad work. I must say I'm very glad of this general Party meeting. It's given me my first sight of you. I hadn't met you before. You've never once visited our shop."

"Doesn't it seem to you, comrade shop manager, that you're slandering the works Party organization?" demanded the secretary of the Party committee, with ill-suppressed rancour.

"No, it doesn't," Makarov returned evenly. "I maintain that if you were less self-satisfied, if you kept Party work up to the mark, production work would also improve: we'd put out more armour plate, more shells, more cartridge metal. You've heard the comrades speak today. There's your judgment."

With a sweeping gesture, Makarov indicated the silent hall. Then, quietly, he left the platform.

The secretary of the Party committee said:

"I move that the meeting immediately discuss Comrade Makarov's conduct."

Again a stir passed over the hall. When the noise subsided, someone asked loudly, from one of the back rows:

"Comrade chairman, may I have the floor?"

"Gayevoi!" cried a dozen voices, before Makarov could place the speaker.

Gayevoi was still remembered at the works,

though he had been away for many years. He would not have been forgotten, had his absence lasted as many years again. Coming down the aisle, in the familiar coat, now hanging loosely from his shoulders, with his cap, as always, the least bit tilted, he was detained at every row by eager friends. Shatilov sprang up and hugged him as he might a brother.

Rotov, in the presidium, stared at Gayevoi with unconcealed amazement. Where had he dropped from? He must have come straight from the airfield to the Party meeting. That was just like him, of course!

Gayevoi mounted to the platform and, removing his cap, stood waiting for the hubbub to abate.

"Yesterday, comrades, I was received at the Central Committee of our Party," he said finally; and an instant silence filled the hall. "I've been directed here as works Party organizer for the Central Committee. Since I left here, some years ago, I've been called upon to pull two different works out of bad holes. That wasn't easy. But what I have to do here will be harder still. You've always done well, always been praised, always been our country's pride. But there are those among you who refuse to realize that that's not sufficient now." He glanced significantly in

the direction of the works administration. "What was excellent yesterday, in peacetime conditions, is unsatisfactory today, in time of war. Many comrades think that once the works fulfils its war orders, that means it's up to wartime standards. No, that's not enough. Unity of our front and rearguard means, among other things, unity of method: the method of arduous battle, of offensive action. Comrade Stalin, the Central Committee have faith in us, the great army of the metal front. They are confident that we will not delay in launching our offensive -irresistible as our army's offensive outside Moscow...."

Gayevoi's voice was drowned in a storm of applause. The people in the hall sprang to their feet, cheering as one man. The will of the country's leader was their will. the will of the entire Soviet people.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

A little past noon, the door to the director's waiting room was suddenly opened, and the People's Commissar walked in. Arriving from Sverdlovsk by plane, without warning, he had been driven to the works in a car belonging to the airline administration.

There were several people in the room, waiting to see the director. Among them, the People's Commissar recognized the chairman of the town Soviet, an old acquaintance. Greeting him cordially, he enquired:

"Have you been waiting long?"

"Over two hours," the chairman replied.

"Is Rotov in conference?" asked the People's Commissar, turning to the director's secretary.

"N-no," the secretary mumbled nervously.

"Then why the delay? Some visitor?"

"No, he's alone. He's busy."

Producing a key from his desk drawer, the secretary hurried to the director's door, unlocked it, and flung it open.

The People's Commissar stopped at the threshold.

"May one come in, comrade director?" he asked Rotov, who had not even raised his head when the door was opened.

"Comrade People's Commissar!" Rotov cried, springing to his feet. "How can you ask?"

Turning back to the waiting room, the People's Commissar said:

"Come in, comrades. All of you. The director will see you immediately."

He called for the latest reports on the work of the shops, and settled down in a corner to study them.

The first to come in was a clerk from the army commissariat, with a list of workers desiring to go to the front as volunteers. The director crossed out a few names, and signed the list. Then the chairman of the town Soviet came in, with some problem which the director immediately settled. In less than half an hour, all the visitors had been received and the office was empty.

The People's Commissar laid aside the materials he had been studying.

"What's come over you?" he demanded. "Is that how the war affects you? If I ever hear again that you keep people waiting two hours and more, when you could settle their business as you did just now, in twenty minutes by my watch, why. . . . Well, I don't advise you to try it. And now, order a car. I want to go through the works."

Clearly, the People's Commissar was pressed for time, or Rotov could not have escaped a severe dressing down. Now, he supposed, things would proceed as usual. The People's Commissar would spend the remainder of the day on a tour of the works, looking in at every shop in turn. In the evening, he would speak of observed shortcomings, and the director would wonder at his own failure to notice them. The next day, perhaps

even two, would be devoted to the main shops. In each of these the People's Commissar would spend several hours, going into every aspect of the work, from technology to rates of pay. Nor would he neglect to visit the workers' dining rooms.

This time, however, the usual procedure was somewhat altered. The People's Commissar passed by the blast furnace shop without so much as a glance, confining his inspection chiefly to the open-hearth building, the rolling mills, and the heat treatment shops. Everywhere he found the same trouble, heard the same complaint: insufficient gas. In sections where no one spoke of this, he himself enquired about it; and Rotov noticed that his questions were addressed to workers far more often than to engineers.

In one of the shops, he looked in at the dining room. Sitting down at a corner table, he examined the dishes and cloth, then turned to his neighbour, an elderly worker, who had just been served with a plate of soup, and said:

"Could you let me have your portion? They'll bring you another right away."

The worker nodded. The People's Commissar tried the soup, and grimaced disgustedly.

The dining room manager came hurrying in, followed by a waitress carrying a steaming plate of quite a different soup.

The People's Commissar looked silently up at the manager.

Flushing, she stammered in reply to his unspoken question:

"This is for you, Comrade People's Commissar."

"And why not the same for everybody?" he enquired.

"Provisions are short."

"Is that true, comrade director?"

"True enough," Rotov replied.

The People's Commissar set the soup that had been brought him before his neighbour, apologized for the delay, and left the dining room.

"You're bold enough about demanding high-grade coal, and freight cars, and locomotives," he told Rotov as they came out. "And, so far as I can recall, you've never been refused. Why don't you demand food supplies with the same spirit and energy?"

"The times are so hard..."

"And if they are? Do you really think we're so poor we can't keep a works like this properly supplied? No, it's simply that you don't give sufficient thought to people, human beings. That's where your trouble lies. I could see that in your waiting room, this afternoon."

For the evening, the People's Commissar ordered a conference, to be attended by the managers of the shops he had visited in the course of the day. This, too, was a departure from the usual procedure, as he did not ordinarily hold conference until he had seen all the shops.

At eight o'clock sharp, the People's Commissar entered the director's office. Under his arm was a folder at which Rotov glanced with some uneasiness: the stenographic record of the last general Party meeting. Greeting the assembled engineers, the People's Commissar took his seat at the head of the long conference table. Two chairs were still empty. Mokshin and Makarov had not yet come in.

"While we're waiting," the People's Commissar suggested, "there's one question, not directly concerning the present conference, that I'd like to have settled without delay. Why does the finishing bay of No. 2 blooming mill work so badly?"

Rotov got up. He had been intending himself to bring up the question of Nechayev's removal, and this was the best opportunity he could have wished.

"The manager of the finishing bay can't seem to cope with his job," he declared.

"Who's the manager?"

"Comrade Nechayev."

"That's very strange," exclaimed the People's Commissar, glancing down the table at Nechayev. "Comrade Nechayev was chief rolling mill engineer at one of our big Southern works. I can't understand why he should fail to cope with so much smaller a responsibility."

Nechayev jumped up to answer; but Rotov anticipated him, declaring:

"Such things often happen, when a big-job man is put on a little job. In a big job, you need only command, whereas in a smaller job you have to work. That's much harder."

"I see," said the People's Commissar, smiling wryly. "Then I take it—following up your logic, comrade director—that if you were shifted tomorrow to some lower position, you'd promptly fall down on the job. An interesting theory!"

Rotov flushed. The People's Commissar continued:

"But I'd like to hear what Comrade Nechayev has to say. What's holding up the work?"

"The bloom finishing bay is working well," said Nechayev tersely.

"And for that reason it lags so far behind the mill that there's no more room to pile the unfinished blooms!" put in Rotov, with a mocking smile.

"The finishing bay is working well," Nechayev repeated. "The men turn out three hundred to three hundred and fifty per cent of quota, regularly. And we're fully manned."

He fell silent. He had never been much of a speaker.

"Then why so much unfinished work?" the People's Commissar demanded impatiently.

"Because the rolling practice at this works is based on a foul theory," said Nechayev, with sudden heat. "'Anything will go!'—that seems to be the gist of it. Just look at the facts. Instead of the usual one to two per cent, we get ten per cent of imperfect blooms. And in the last week"—he glanced defiantly at Rotoz—"in the last week, with the chief engineer away sick, we've been getting fifteen per cent. Why, two bays couldn't cope with such a quantity!"

"Can the technical inspection manager confirm these figures?" asked the People's Commissar.

The figures were confirmed. After some reflection, the People's Commissar said:

"Very well, then. We'll settle it this way: I'll appoint Comrade Nechayev manager of both of the blooming mills, to be in charge of both rolling and finishing. I believe that will do away with the lag in finishing."

Rotov stared at him, stupefied, forgetting the lighted match in his hand; but Netchayev sat down with a look of tranquil satisfaction, as though this were the very decision he had been expecting.

There was a silence. Then the People's Commissar enquired:

"What's wrong with Yevgeni Mikhailovich? Is he seriously ill?"

"Angina, I believe," Rotov replied, lighting another match.

"How is he feeling? When did he last telephone?"

"Yesterday. Or perhaps it was the day before."

The People's Commissar took up the receiver and dialled Mokshin's home. After enquiring about the chief engineer's health, and advising him to take care of himself, he requested him to call his wife to the telephone. Blocking the speaking tube with his palm, he enquired of Rotov, in a hurried whisper:

"What's her name?"

Rotov did not answer.

"Yevdokia Ivanovna," someone called down the table.

"Good evening, Yevdokia Ivanovna," the People's Commissar said into the telephone. "I want to complain to you about your husband. For one

thing, he insists there's nothing he needs. For another, he never eats a bite, all day at the works. Why is that?"

After listening attentively for a moment, he thanked her and hung up the receiver.

"One has to devote a little thought to people like Mokshin," he said, turning to the director. "They'll never say a word about their own needs, because they never think about themselves. Your chief engineer works day and night. No matter when I telephone, he's always at the works, either in his office or somewhere in the shops. And he doesn't eat a thing. The waitress finds his meals untouched. It turns out that he needs special diet. Send your supply manager to me the first thing tomorrow."

Never before had Rotov found himself thus put into the position of a schoolboy receiving a lesson in good breeding. Realizing that the engineers around the table fully appreciated the situation, he found it very difficult to swallow. Cigarette after half-smoked cigarette flew into the ashtray at his elbow.

The People's Commissar saw the director's irritation, but made no comment. Glancing once more up and down the table, he said:

"The manager of No. 2 open-hearth is still missing. Where can he be?"

"Discipline doesn't seem to be Makarov's strong point," Rotov answered. "He lets his own shop run itself, and goes roaming around the works to shops where he doesn't belong."

"What shops?"

"He spent a whole week at the coking plant, only recently. He's probably there now, too."

The People's Commissar understood Rotov's hint. "Your man," he was evidently thinking, "appointed over my head- and how do you like him?" This was clear to all present.

"Well, we'll have to start without him," the People's Commissar said, after a pause. "I suppose he'll turn up later. The question I want cleared up tonight is this: what lies behind the gas trouble at the works? The steelmen say the coking plant doesn't supply enough gas; the coke men say the shops don't take enough. Which is right?"

The coking plant superintendent spoke at earnest length, pointing out that the coking process was held up by the low quality of the coal which had been coming in of late.

The People's Commissar heard this speech out patiently. When the superintendent had finished, however, he enquired:

"What about your kilometre gas line? Is there nothing wrong there?"

"The gas line isn't ours," the superintendent answered.

"Not ours? I don't exactly understand. Not Soviet property, by any chance?"

"I mean, it's not in our charge. The gas department manager answers for it."

A foppishly dressed little engineer, distinguished chiefly by the meticulous perfection with which his hair was parted, got up at this and declared, with perceptible nervousness:

"The gas line belongs to the coking plant."

"Just as I say!" exclaimed the People's Commissar. "To hear you talk, one might think the gas line wasn't ours at all, wasn't Soviet. But you engineers--aren't you Soviet, either? One end says the gas isn't taken; the other end says it isn't supplied. And whose job is it to find out where the trouble lies? Bad coal is beside the point in this problem, so far as I can see. More probably, the trouble lies in the gas line you all disclaim so energetically. It must be clogged."

"The American design calls for steam treatment once in three months," returned the engineer with the meticulously parted hair, in suddenly restored assurance. "The gas line was treated with steam two and a half months ago. Consequently, it can't possibly be clogged."

The People's Commissar could not restrain a disgusted grimace.

"Our engineers have raised the capacity of the coke ovens to two hundred and fifty per cent of the American rating," he said. "Consequently, deposits in the line are greater, and steam treatment is required more often. It's about time we forgot these outdated American standards in running our Russian works! And what's more, no steam treatment can do any good, if there's unrefined tar carried along with the naphthalene."

He was silent for a while, his fingers tapping absently on the table. Then, looking up again at the engineer with the meticulous part, he asked:

"Have you measured the amount of deposits?"

"Even in European practice, no instrument is known for making such measurements," the engineer returned.

"No instrument? And what about a stick?" demanded the People's Commissar, with rising irritation. "A plain, ordinary stick-- can you conceive of such an instrument? Drill a few holes in the pipe, and push a stick in to measure the deposits. Or, if you're afraid of dirtying your hands, measure the drop in pressure."

As he was finishing, Makarov came quietly into the room, grimy as a chimney sweep, and stopped just inside the door, leaning against the jamb.

"There's a model of discipline," said Rotov caustically. "A nice state you're in to attend a conference with the People's Commissar, not to speak of your coming late. Where have you been—at the coking plant again?"

"In that vicinity," Makarov replied, very low.

There was a dull depression in his tone, in his entire aspect, which startled and alarmed the People's Commissar.

"In that vicinity! You've been at the plant, of course. You simply reek of gas," Rotov exclaimed, in a tone which seemed to imply that the odour of gas was even more reprehensible than that of vodka. "You know I forbade you to go there."

"You didn't forbid me to go anywhere," Makarov replied, in the same low voice, shaping the words with evident difficulty. "You forbade them, out there, to let me in."

The People's Commissar glanced from the shop manager to the director. His eyes flashed. As calmly as he could, he asked Makarov:

"What makes the coking plant work so badly, Vasili Nikolayevich?"

"And what's to make it work well?" Makarov asked in return. He drew a long breath, like a diver before the leap, trying to fill his lungs with air.

It was a rude reply; but Makarov was swaying with weakness. Even the whites of his eyes had turned yellow with gas poisoning. Patiently, the People's Commissar repeated his question:

"Still, I'd like to know what makes the coking plant work so badly."

There was a lengthy pause before Makarov answered. Perhaps he was trying to collect his thoughts: perhaps he was simply too tired to speak.

"The pipe line from the coking plant to the gas holders, twelve hundred metres long," he said at last--and paused to gasp for breath. "Nearly half its bore is clogged with naphthalene. I took the measurement myself, with a stick. If we go on using the line, the whole works will be brought to a standstill."

The director threw a swift glance at the People's Commissar; and his nervous start drew all eyes in the same direction.

Never before had the director, or any of those present, seen in the eyes of the People's Commissar what they read in them at this moment: fright, plain, human fright, more terrible to face than anger or condemnation.

Makarov swung away from the doorjamb and moved unsteadily towards the table. Sinking weak-

ly into a chair, as though his knees had given under him, he laid his tar-smeared hands on the plush tablecloth.

All eyes were fixed on the People's Commissar.

"How long a stoppage?" the People's Commissar asked the manager of the gas department, who was smoothing his hair with trembling fingers.

"Five days, at the very least," the manager replied, barely audibly.

Just then the telephone rang. Rotov took the receiver, and an instant later announced that Comrade Beria was being put through.

"Well, talk to him yourself," the People's Commissar said curtly. "Tell him yourself how you've reduced the works to stoppage. I have nothing to say. I haven't arrived at any decision yet."

Noticing the director's sudden pallor, however, the People's Commissar got up and took the receiver.

Rotov made no attempt to conceal his relief.

"Yes, Comrade Beria," the People's Commissar said into the telephone. He had turned away from the table, and none of the engineers could see his face. "It looks pretty bad. Production

will be increased, and I'll take charge of the armour plate myself. But there are things that must be done before any results are possible. The director asks permission to close down the works for . . . forty-eight hours."

Makarov glanced across the table at Nechaev. Things would be improved—of that he had no doubt. But must there really be such a stoppage?

The People's Commissar was listening intently. At length, he put the receiver slowly down and turned back to the table. There was a protracted silence, broken only by the nervous tapping of his fingers on the table top.

"Do you know what Comrade Beria said?" the People's Commissar began finally. "He said, 'A works director who can admit the thought of a two-day stoppage is well on the way to disqualification as a director.' And it was only two days I'd spoken of, not five. What could I say to that? He was perfectly right. Our steel goes into production, literally, right off the wheels. Special engines are sent out to meet the trains. The Germans still have the advantage over us in tanks—we all know that. Do you realize what it means to stop production for two days? It means that for two days some section of our front will be left without proper defence. What can that be

called, if not downright betrayal of our Motherland?"

Heavy beads of perspiration stood out on Rotov's forehead. The manager of the gas department poured himself a glass of water.

Turning to Rotov, the People's Commissar asked:

"How did all this come about?"

"I'll tell you about that afterwards, Comrade People's Commissar," Rotov replied, with a significant glance at the assembled engineers.

"No, you'll tell me about it right now," the People's Commissar said harshly. "You're far too concerned over your own prestige. A man who admits his mistakes, and corrects them, will never lose prestige by that. And here you have before you the managers of vital shops, men entrusted with responsibility for thousands of tons of steel, for millions of rubles of the people's money. They have the full right to demand an accounting from you, and it would be a great shame if they failed to assert that right. Now, how did it come about?"

"A day's stoppage for cleaning the gas line was set for June first, but I postponed it to July first, and in the meantime the war began."

"And what of that? Did you think war made steel unnecessary?"

"I thought it would be awkward politically. Mass meetings everywhere, popular feeling—and the works suddenly shut down for a whole day!"

"That was political misjudgment. You should have ordered the stoppage at once, in the interval before the war orders began."

"Well, and then the war orders started coming. How could I stop the works after that, Comrade People's Commissar?"

"And how did you think you could keep it running?"

"It seemed to me that as the bore of the pipes decreased, the velocity of the gas would increase, and deposits diminish."

"But what actually happened?"

"Just the reverse."

"Yes," said the People's Commissar, after a short pause, "there you added technical to political misjudgment. And what are you planning to do next? Have you anything in mind?"

Shamefacedly, Rotov replied:

"Nothing, Comrade People's Commissar."

"I suppose you've kept your own counsel? Not consulted with anyone?"

Rotov shook his head. The People's Commissar continued:

"That's another gross error. You seem to think it would be beneath your dignity, as director of

a big works like this, to ask your subordinates' advice. It's about time you realized that no one man can ever learn all that they know" with a sweeping gesture, he indicated the assembled shop managers--"no, not if he has five full lifetimes to do it in! Yet you think you know more than all of them taken together. Well, if you do, why don't you go ahead? Find a way out, without anyone's advice or help!"

Makarov, listening through the talk to the accustomed din of the works, reflected mournfully on the approaching hour when all these sounds must cease, and the entire works be sunk in the same dead hush that had hung over the Donbas through the days of evacuation. At the thought of the front, to be deprived for five long days of the works' armour and shells, his heart contracted in pain and fear.

"But why five days?" the People's Commissar asked the gas department manager.

"The manholes in the line are fifty metres apart. In other words, only twenty-four men can be working simultaneously. And the naphthalene sediment will have to be chipped off bit by bit, because there's no room to swing a pick properly."

"Can't we drill another twenty or thirty openings?" demanded the People's Commissar.

"Of course we can. That will give you fifty-odd men instead of twenty-four. And then, we can bring up compressed air, and provide pneumatic picks. That will cut the time about in half. Two and a half days. Well, and the workers will save us another ten or twelve hours. We'll call them together and say, 'We miscalculated. Help us out; help the works out of this scrape.' And they'll help, never fear."

The People's Commissar glanced down the table. Every face had brightened. The director, slumped in his armchair, straightened up, eagerly seeking in his mind still further means of cutting down the time.

"And now, can anyone suggest another method?" asked the People's Commissar, in the tone of a teacher who has solved a difficult problem in his own mind, but wishes his pupils, too, to solve it without assistance.

There was a startled silence.

Then Makarov raised his head. Slight as the movement was, the People's Commissar noticed it immediately. Their eyes met.

"Yes, Vasili Nikolayevich?"

"What if we tried the method that's been used at one of our Donbas plants?" Makarov suggested, his voice vibrant with a joy which he feared to admit, even to himself, yet could not restrain.

"Are you referring to the experiment at the Stalino works?"

"Exactly."

"That's what I had in mind when I put the question. I wanted you people to think of it yourselves."

At this point the door swung open, and Mokshin entered the room. Always thin and pale, he seemed little altered by his illness. When he had shaken hands with the People's Commissar, and greeted all present, he turned to pull out his chair; but he was interrupted by a question from the People's Commissar:

"Well, comrade chief engineer, so we're going to shut down the works?"

"Shut it down? What for?" asked Mokshin. in sudden alarm, his light eyes opening wide behind the thick glass of his spectacles.

"To clean the gas line."

Mokshin's anxiety disappeared.

"Yes," he rumbled calmly, **"that will have to be done."**

"And is that all you have to say?" exclaimed the People's Commissar, exasperated by his tranquillity. **"Since when have such things meant so little to you, Comrade Mokshin? If the director did wrong in cancelling your order, was that any excuse for you to wash your hands of everything?"**

And another thing: how does it come about that a whole kilometre of gas line has no master? Everyone here disclaims it. 'Not ours,' they say."

Mokshin's face set grimly.

"That's not so," he declared, and strode rapidly out of the room. A moment later he returned, with a chart of the gas lines on the works territory, which he laid on the table before the People's Commissar.

"The kilometre gas line is in charge of the gas department," he said, staring straight at the engineer with the meticulously parted hair.

The engineer, suddenly pale, rose to his feet.

"Then you were lying to us?" demanded the People's Commissar, turning on him wrathfully.

"I . . . I lost my head, and. . ."

"When people lose their heads, they blurt out the truth. When they lie, you can be sure they know what they're about," said the People's Commissar, very slowly and distinctly. "You've been deceiving the director all this time, keeping the real state of the gas line from him. And today you lied to us all."

And suddenly, unable further to restrain the indignation which had been accumulating all through this conference, he shouted:

"Get out!"

The engineer blinked at him uncomprehendingly, nervously smoothing back his hair. Then, turning, he stumbled hastily out of the room, followed by cold, hostile glances.

"A mistake could be excused," the People's Commissar said, half apologetically. "But a lie. . . . Well, then, Comrade Mokshin, for how long do you propose to stop the works?"

"About two hours, I'm afraid," Mokshin answered regretfully.

"Two—hours?"

"Well, perhaps it can be managed in an hour and a half. Why should that surprise you so?" Mokshin asked, misunderstanding the impression his words had made. "You can't expect me to do it all in five minutes!"

"Just what are you intending to do?"

"I've decided to rearrange the system of gas circulation: send the coke gas along the line we've been using to bring the blast furnace gas to the coking plant, and switch the blast furnace gas to the clogged coke gas line. One remarkable thing about blast furnace gas is its capacity for dissolving and absorbing naphthalene. Well, and that will clean out the line for us. All the preparatory work is done, but still"—and Mokshin glanced guiltily at the People's Commissar—"the works will have to be stopped for about two hours."

"So you've decided to repeat the Southern experiment?"

"I've never heard of any such experiment. I worked this out as a result of sleepless nights, a review of chemistry, consultation with other engineers, and—well, to be frank—desperation."

"Because the works director had made a mistake, and you had to set it right?"

Mokshin sighed heavily.

"The director had the right to make mistakes, on questions of this sort," he said. "But I had no such right. I should have made a firm stand—protested to Moscow, if necessary. But I didn't do that. In other words, I fell down on my job, and it was up to me to find a way out."

"I see," said the People's Commissar. "It seems, then, that brilliant ideas have many birthplaces." He smiled with open pleasure and relief.

"I don't exactly understand," Mokshin confessed.

"Comrade Makarov proposed this very method. I had it in mind. You worked it out independently. And it has already been applied in Stalino."

"Why, I wouldn't call that many birthplaces," rumbled Mokshin cheerfully. "All brilliant ideas have one birthplace—the Soviet Union."

The tension in the office had lifted. There was a wave of little, comfortable sounds: the

snapping of cigarette cases, the rustle of papers, the pushing back of chairs. Several engineers gathered around Makarov, questioning him about the gas line.

Late at night, the conference over, they remained alone together: the People's Commissar and the works director. The People's Commissar leaned back in his chair, his eyes half-closed—the eyes of a steelman, sensitive to light as a result of too-frequent gazing into the flaming heart of the furnace. His voice was tired, and he spoke with visible effort.

"It's a strange thing," he began. "You've clearly been trying to adjust the works to wartime effort, yet you've altogether failed to adjust your own self. You have the wrong idea of wartime reorganization. Once there's a war on, you seem to think, the only way to manage is by demanding, commanding, ordering people about. And as a result—blunder upon blunder! Take the construction projects. In some, you're doing splendidly. You set the armour plate rolling shop in operation in three months. Nowhere in Europe, or America either, has a job like that been done so fast. The new blast furnace, too—it's coming up at record speed. Yet at the same time you fall down on determining what might be called, in

military terms, the direction of the main drive. You've neglected the one link that drags the whole chain down. That link, just now, is gas. Only more gas can help you put out more steel; and steel means victory. Why don't you coordinate your effort? Why is the new coke battery coming up so much more slowly than the new blast furnace? The cleaning of the pipe line will make things easier, of course, but you know yourself it won't solve the problem. I can't understand how you could keep on this way, knowing the works was threatened with stoppage. Why, in those two hours before the thing was settled, I went through...."

He paused, seeking words adequate to express his thought; but, with a shrug, gave up the effort. He was too tired of late, too tired after the day just over.

"After all, the works hasn't stopped," Rotov returned. Little by little, his old assurance was reviving.

"No, it hasn't stopped," said the People's Commissar. "But it was in danger of stopping. And it wasn't by any effort of yours that the stoppage was prevented. It was your subordinates that saved the situation--Mokshin, and Makarov. And another thing: your attitude towards these same subordinates. You get a man here like Ma-

karov, chief engineer of a big Donbas works - and you permit yourself to abuse him, even in my presence. Yet he goes out in this wind and frost, like a rank-and-file gasman, to drill the pipe line, to search for gas, to seek a way out for the works, and for you, too, as the works director. You might remember, again, that Makarov has lost a boy who was all the world to him, his only child; yet he works on with all his heart and soul."

The People's Commissar screwed up his eyes until they were almost closed; but it was not the light that bothered him.

"You don't consult with anyone," he continued. "You're so tremendously concerned over your prestige. Yet it's not too great, that prestige of yours. You're obeyed, true enough; but that's due to discipline and patriotism, not to any prestige you've earned. Prestige grows up around a leader who knows how to help, and how to demand, in the proper proportions. One who does nothing but help is looked upon as a milch cow; one who can only demand--as a hateful driver. There are two expressions you've been using much too frequently of late: 'No excuses,' and 'I command.' It's up to us, on top, to administer in such a way that people aren't faced with obstacles or hindrances beyond their power to con-

trol. How else can we do away with 'excuses'? Out in the Ukraine, one day, a worker said to me: 'When the manger is full, why should the oxen bellow?' Remember Comrade Sergo. His first question was always the same: 'What help is needed?' And he always helped, often gave even more than was asked. But—he also demanded."

The big clock on the wall struck four. The People's Commissar glanced at his watch.

"Two o'clock, Moscow time," he exclaimed, "and you and I haven't even heard the communiqué!"

He telephoned the despatcher's office, and asked:

"What does the radio say?"

As he listened to the reply, his lips curved in a faint smile.

"So we're chasing them?"

Satisfied, he laid down the receiver, and, turning his tired eyes once more to the director, went on:

"There's another thing, too, that you've forgotten. A leader must be liked. That doubles the initiative of the people working under him. You—no, you're not liked in the works, though you've done so much to advance it. You don't realize that a body of people such as you have here is really something in the way of a big family. And the head of a family has more duties than the mere

provision of food and clothing. How do you behave at home come in, slap your salary down on the table, and nothing more? Of course not! You'll talk tenderly with your wife, and pet your children. Well, and the works collective needs that too --a pleasant word, a friendly enquiry. Has anyone ever had that from you? Your concern is all for everyone in general, to the exclusion of anyone in particular."

The People's Commissar relit his cigarette, which had long since gone out. Rotov reached for his cigarette case.

"Of course," the People's Commissar continued, "you're very occupied. I realize that. But remember Lenin! Back in '21, when the same question hung in the balance for us as today: to be, or not to be--back in '21, Lenin found time to write Semashko a note, asking him to select eyeglasses for a peasant who had come to the capital with some request from his village. Yes, he found time, not only to write the note, but to follow it up. And that's only one example, out of an endless number. Yet you can't find the time to drop a friendly word to anyone, not to one in a day out of all this splendid collective! Show a man a little thought, a little friendly warmth, and he'll share that warmth with his comrades at work, with his wife, with his neigh-

hours. Warm one heart, and many hearts will be warmer."

The telephone rang. The director answered. "Comrade Beria again," he said, and handed the receiver across the table.

The People's Commissar listened briefly, then replied, with equal brevity:

"We'll stop for an hour and a half, at the most two hours, Comrade Beria, but after that output will go up immediately. I'll take charge of the armour plate myself for the time being; and I'll have to make some changes in the works administration."

Replacing the receiver, he declared, with a stern glance at the astounded director:

"Yes, we've a war to fight. There's no time now to wait till you reform. Natures like yours call for drastic measures."

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

Shutting his apartment door firmly behind him, Krainev went down the stairs and out into the street.

His thoughts, composed and lucid, focussed around the all-absorbing problem: how best to execute his plan.

On reaching the works, he heard out the report of the senior politsai on duty at the gates, and, to create an appearance of zealous service, issued a number of orders for the day.

Now the gates lay behind, and he was crossing the works territory towards the power station.

Up the steps. A pause at the door. The sentinel on duty sent for his superior, who in turn sent for the commander of the station guards. This commander, a lean, elderly German, confirmed Krainev's right to enter-- but at once attached himself to the intruding Russian, and followed his every step.

Krainev stopped in at the office and called for the list of employees, which he examined with a great show of interest. Through this procedure the commander of the station guards sat opposite him at the desk, smoking impatiently.

Then they set out to inspect the station.

In the machine room, the concrete foundation of the big generator stood bare and desolate, as Krainev had seen it that last, memorable day. The smaller generator was humming smoothly, and red lamps glowed, as always, on the control panel. But these lamps were very few. The greater part of the panel was dark. Beside it stood a sleepy, long-nosed German in pince-nez, and a Russian worker. Both stared at Krai-

nev in evident surprise. They were not used to seeing Russian visitors here.

Continuing his systematic "inspection," Krainev, followed by the German commander, approached the base of the working generator. There were the well-remembered niches, and, on the concrete wall, the chalked crosses where Brovin had ordered the explosive piled.

Krainev's heart was beating fast.

Now he approached the trapdoor leading to the cable channel. Calling over two nearby workers, he ordered them to lift the door. They brought crowbars, and, after some exertion, succeeded in raising the heavy iron plate.

Krainev released one of the workers, and sent the other for a lantern. While he was waiting, he bent and dropped a crowbar through the opening.

The dull echo of its fall sent a sudden shudder up his spine. It called back to memory the mine shaft where his father had been killed.

"Not a lucky family, ours," he reflected. "Father was killed by the Whites. I'll be killed by the Germans. And Vadim?"

At the thought of his son, Krainev's heart throbbed with searing hatred for the enemy.

"Get a move on, can't you?" he shouted to the worker, who was approaching unhurriedly

with a lighted lantern. "Go on down, and take that crowbar along."

They filed down the steps into the cable channel: first the worker, lighting the way; then Krainev, and, at his heels, the grumbling German. What the restless visitor could be seeking in this damp, cold vault was beyond the German's understanding; but he followed doggedly. Orders were orders, and he had been ordered not to allow the chief of the Russian guards out of his sight for so much as an instant.

Krainev rehearsed in his mind the final steps of his plan. When they reached the wall Lobachov had erected, he would have the worker smash a hole through the masonry and leave. And after that? After that, one blow with the butt of his revolver, to stun the German. Then, quickly, he must get out the fuse and detonators, fire them, thrust them in at the hole, and run.

Run? What for? But yes, he knew that he must run. He would die in any case, of course; but it would be beyond all human power to stand there quietly, watching the flame lick up along the fuse counting off the seconds before death.

They reached the end of the channel. The worker raised his lantern. Krainev stiffened with horror.

The masonry had been broken down, and the ammonite was gone.

It was a crushing blow. Slowly, Krainev moved back along the channel and up the steps. Emerging, he paused for a moment, then hurried out of the building. The German, staring after him, wondered dully how he had failed to notice before that this Russian was drunk.

Krainev wandered aimlessly about the works territory. What did it matter, now, which way he went? Mechanically, he got through the day's routine.

Only in the evening, as he came out at the gates, did his dazed bewilderment lift. Then, desperately, he questioned himself:

"What am I to do now? What am I to do?"

Late at night, Krainev was roughly shaken out of the restless sleep into which he had fallen on the sofa in his study. With a great effort, he forced his eyes open. Valya Teplova was bending over him. He sat up heavily.

"What happened?" Valya asked, looking intently into Krainev's face. Never before had she seen him so pale and worn.

He did not answer.

"Why didn't you blow up the station?" she asked again, her tone cold and impersonal.

"I decided I wanted to live," he returned tartly, yielding to a strange urge to hurt her feelings. But he regretted the words almost before they were said.

Valya shook her head.

"That's not true, Sergei Petrovich," she said gently. "Tell me what really happened."

Dropping his voice to a whisper, he told her:

"The Germans are smarter than I thought."

And, still whispering, he described what he had found at the power station.

There was a long pause. Then Valya said mournfully:

"And to think of the mess you've made in the machine shop! How could you work that way? How could you?"

"Valya," he said, with sudden composure, "ask Serdyuk what I'm to do with myself now. I can't think of anything. Some end has to be put to this farce of my working for the Germans."

She felt the torment he was suffering: but she could find no words of comfort. Her heart, too, was heavy beyond bearing.

Next morning Krainev arrived at the works somewhat later than usual. While the senior poli-

tsai was delivering his report, an anguished scream sounded, somewhere very near.

"Someone being flogged in the guardroom," explained the politsai, noticing Krainev's startled look.

"Flogged? Who's being flogged? Why flogged?"

"What do you mean - why?" the politsai returned, openly amazed at his superior's ignorance. "Maybe he made a lighter, or a comb. They flog 'em for every little thing. Who can live on three hundred grams of bread a day? Well, and if you make some trifle to sell, and they catch you with it on the way out, you're in for a lashing. They used to drag everyone to the works owner, but now they've got a regular schedule worked out: how many lashes for what, and they take care of it themselves."

Krainev went into the guardroom. This was a long, narrow place, dimly lighted by one small window opening on the yard.

On a bench in the middle of the room, under a sheet of wet tarpaulin, lay a young boy, tied hand and foot, writhing under the cruel blows of the lash. In the brief intervals between blows, he would raise his head and scream; but each time the lash came down his head would drop to the bench again, and blood would trickle out between his parted lips.

Most appalling of all, however, in this appalling scene, was the face of the German who wielded the lash. It expressed neither anger nor brutality. Calmly, methodically, as one might chop wood, he swung the lash up and down over the writhing victim.

"Stop!" Krainev shouted furiously; but the German only glanced at him indifferently and brought the lash down again.

Beside himself with anger, Krainev whipped out his revolver. The German squealed and darted out of the room, dropping his lash—a veritable instrument of mediaeval torture—to the floor.

Krainev tried to unfasten the tarpaulin, but his trembling fingers only fumbled the knots.

There were several politzais in the room. Krainev ordered them to release the prisoner, and the knots were soon undone.

The boy tried to get up, but could not. Then one of the politzais dragged up a hose and doused him with cold water. This revived him somewhat, and, with a little help, he was able to pull on his clothes and hobble away.

The material evidence of his crime—two crude aluminium combs—remained lying on the dirty window sill.

"Why the tarpaulin?" Krainev asked, when he was calm enough to speak.

One of the politsais replied:

"If you flog 'em naked, you'll half slay 'em, and then they can't work till the skin heals over. This way, there's nothin' to show on top—and what happens to their insides is nobody's worry but their own."

An officer from the baron's bodyguard came running in, with several soldiers and an interpreter.

"Baron von Wechter wants to see you," the interpreter announced.

"Now I've done it!" Krainev told himself. Without a word, he followed the officer, pausing only to pick up the lash from the floor beside the bench.

"Who iss giff you right for to threaten German soldat?" thundered von Wechter, the moment Krainev entered his office.

"And who gave you the right to flog Russian workers?" Krainev returned.

The baron stared, dumbfounded by the Russian's effrontery. After a pause, he declared, much more quietly:

"Right iss not giff, right iss take. We haff take our right."

"Well, and so have I taken my right," said Krainev, with a defiant shrug.

At this the baron's face turned crimson.

"You forget you!" he raged. "You are talk to a German, a baron. You are talk to the owner from the works!"

"And you're talking to the chief of the works guards."

Von Wechter glanced at the officer and soldiers, standing passively just inside the door. He would have liked to send them away, so that they might not witness his discomfiture in the face of a mere chief of the guards; but he was afraid to remain alone with this unaccountable Russian.

Speechless with wrath, he strode feverishly up and down between his desk and the window.

"I must request you," Krainev continued steadily, "not to make my task more difficult than it already is. If you continue flogging workers, you'll have your next batch of tanks set on fire too, and perhaps the whole machine shop, while they're at it."

"Try me not to teach," the baron interrupted brusquely. "I must to kill the Bolshevist contagion. I wass study in one school for Russische industrialists in Leipzig. I know gut the Russische character."

Krainev sat down calmly in an armchair by the desk, took a cigar from the baron's open box, and lit it unhurriedly. Von Wechter immediately

hastened to his seat behind the desk. He could not very well remain standing, with his subordinate leaning back in an armchair, blowing smoke rings!

"No, you don't know the Russian character," Krainev said coldly. "The Russian character—there it is. Take a look at it!" And he pointed through the window at the dark figure hanging from a distant lamppost—Vorobyov.

"What you are want from me?" von Wechter cried, in sudden panic. This Russian was undergoing an incredible metamorphosis. Accused, he bore himself as the accuser. Subordinate to the German, he was subordinating the German's will to his own.

"What I want is little enough," Krainev replied. "Stop the floggings of workers. If there turn out to be a few more among them who prefer death to such treatment, then you and I might as well pack up and leave. I won't be able to keep the works from damage."

With what pleasure would the baron have had this audacious fellow strung up on the same lamppost as Vorobyov! But he recalled the burnt tanks, the damaged machines. He had need of the Russian's services, as yet. Still, he must not yield so easily; and, with ill-simulated composure, he announced:

· "You can to go. I will yet think, und then will I decite."

Coming out of the administration building, Krainev recalled what a Soviet airman had told him, early in the war. German "aces," this flyer had found, invariably swung aside before head-on attacks. Their nerves could not endure the tension. Insolence, in the fascist character, was but the obverse of cowardice.

In the evening, Valya came again, and Krainev, still aroused after his interview with von Wechter, described the morning's events to her in some detail. Valya heard him out with evident disapproval, and, when he had finished, demanded sharply:

"Was that the silliest thing you could think of to do?"

"I couldn't help it, Valya," he returned. "And anyway, what does it matter now? I've lost out, and it's time I put an end to the whole thing."

"Comrade Krainev," she broke in impatiently, "you might be good enough to remember that you belong to an underground organization, and you have no right to end anything, or start anything, either, without orders. I don't come here to see you for the pleasure of it. I'm sent here to deliver instructions."

"Very well, then. Deliver your instructions," he said, piqued at her tone. "What have you to tell me?"

"You're to remain in your present position as chief of the works guards."

"And do what?"

"There's plenty to do. Do you remember the last big air raid we had, during the evacuation?"

"Yes, I remember it clearly."

"Not too clearly, I see. Serdyuk has a better memory. One of the bombs landed in the coal yard, right near the boiler room at the power station; and it didn't explode."

"Well, and what of it?"

"That bomb has to be found and dug up, and then exploded as near the boiler room as possible. In all probability, it was the one-ton high explosive type."

Krainev seized her hand, exclaiming:

"Valya, dear Valya, you've brought me new hope, new life!"

"No, Sergei Petrovich," she returned sadly, "not life, but death."

And after a pause she added, looking sorrowfully into his growing eyes:

"Or rather, immortality."

Before leaving, Valya told Krainev a little of the events of the past few days. At one of the

local mines, the Germans had repaired the hoisting engine and cage. At the first trial, however, the engine had reversed, snapping the cable, and the two-ton cage had gone crashing down to the bottom of the shaft. The cage had been lifted and, with some difficulty, repaired; but at the very next trial the engine had again reversed, with the same results.

Just outside town, a German truck carrying an automatic rifle squad had been badly wrecked when the driver lost control as the result of a sudden blowout on a very steep grade. This was Sasha's work—the effect of one of the strong wire “thorns” he had strewn along this part of the road, in broad daylight, only shortly before.

Two politzais had been killed during a night raid in search of persons evading mobilization.

“The people are at boiling heat,” Valya concluded.

“Yes,” Krainev returned, “the steel is seething. You know, Valya, to myself I've always pictured Comrade Stalin's great work as a vast heat of steel, and Comrade Stalin himself as the most supreme of steelmen. He so directs the intricate processes that our en'ire people fuse into an armour steel of unparalleled strength and hardness; and I feel—I know—that the day is near

when all the Hitlerite scum, the slag of humanity, will be skimmed and cast away to oblivion."

Again the days dragged on, days of constant tension and anxiety.

Krainev had no great difficulty in persuading von Wechter to order a search for unexploded bombs. Indeed, the baron, fearing an explosion in the event of a Soviet air attack, enquired daily as to the progress of the excavations.

Day and night, Krainev was at the works, performing his duties with unfeigned diligence. He was very anxious to maintain his good standing, realizing perfectly that even the most trifling mishap might thwart his plan.

And so he stalked about the territory, armed always with the lash he had taken from the soldier in the guardroom, noting with grim enjoyment that even the Germans seemed awed by his bellicose air.

In the machine shop, which was kept always under strong guard, he belaboured a politsai who had fallen asleep on duty with an energy that might well have been envied by the original owner of the lash.

Excavations in search of unexploded bombs were begun simultaneously in three suspected spots. By the boiler room, however, the work

proceeded much more rapidly than at the other sites, due to Krainev's more frequent visits. The chief of the Russian guards was more feared than any German.

After a few days' labour, the bomb was found and dug free. Two small flatcars were pushed up along the adjacent track, and logs were laid for rolling the bomb onto the cars. At this point, however, a Hitlerite officer suddenly appeared, with several soldiers, and ordered a halt.

It occurred to Krainev that he was probably being watched.

CHAPTER FIFTY

Opanasenko had remained in town to take care of his house and belongings.

It was a fine house the head foreman had bought himself, not long before the war: white brick, bright and cheerful, its big front windows facing the South. Roomy, comfortable, well provided, it made a pleasant home in which to entertain his friends. Another treasured asset was the piano he had purchased for his daughter. Svetlana, quite a big girl now, would play and sing delightfully when there was company, and

Opanasenko was very proud of her accomplishments. There was only one trouble about Svetlana: instead of her mother's quiet humility, she displayed a determined character of her own. True, she would hear out her father's admonitions with every appearance of respect; but when it came to the proof, she acted as she herself found fit, and not as her father bade. And she was only fifteen, too. When she got a little older, there would probably be no managing her at all. Even now, she would sometimes glance at her father with open reproach. Yes, domestic rebellion was obviously in the air.

Rebellion came, and sooner than Opanasenko had expected. Coming home from work one day, at the time when people were preparing for evacuation, he found his daughter stuffing books and music into a suitcase full of clothes.

"Where do you think you're going, Svetlana?" he asked.

"The same place as everybody," she returned. "I'm not going to stay here all alone. My whole class is leaving, and the school. And I'm a Pioneer leader, too."

This was said with a very determined air. Knowing her father's intention to remain in town, Svetlana realized that she would have no easy contest.

"What do you mean—all alone?" Opanasenko demanded. "You'll be staying here with your family."

"Mother's leaving too," the girl declared.

This was a shock from an unexpected quarter.

"What? Without a word to me?" he cried indignantly. "Who's the master in this house, I'd like to know? Who's the head of the family?"

"Well, but, father, don't you see—everyone has two families, you say yourself. One family—that's a person's relatives; and the other is the collective, the people he works with, or studies with."

Opanasenko frowned. No, one should never talk before one's children! This comparison of collective and family—a thought expressed by the shop manager at a trade union meeting—had so struck the head foreman that he had repeated it several times at home; and now his own words were being used against him!

"And which family means more to you?" he asked his daughter.

"The one that teaches me what's right," she replied primly.

He sank heavily into a chair. Children, nowadays! Here he had poked fun at Sasha's mother, because she couldn't manage her boy, and now.... Looking out at his daughter from under knitted brows, as he was wont to look at his subordinates

in the shop when displeased with their work, he asked:

"So your father and mother have taught you wrong—is that what you mean to say?"

"No, they've never taught me wrong," the girl replied, flushing painfully in the realization that she had gone too far. But then, with a sudden defiant gesture, she went on: "Only what good have they taught me? All a person hears in this house is, 'I'm the master,' 'I'm the head of the family.' Yes, and so you are the master, the way they used to be in the old times. You make mother a regular. . . ."

"Praskovya!" roared Opanasenko, jumping to his feet. "Praskovya Petrovna!"

His wife appeared immediately in the doorway. She had been in the next room, listening anxiously to the debate between father and daughter.

"What's been going on here, behind my back?" Opanasenko demanded. "Planning to leave, are you?"

"We ought to be going, Yevstigneyevich. Everyone is. It's sort of frightening to stay behind."

"And where will you come home to, afterwards? Where will you come home to, can you tell me? There won't be anything left, and we'll have to start again with empty hands. All the

years I worked for this home of ours—for you, I did it. And now you want to leave. Do you think I can keep it safe for you all alone, without your help? Our first house burnt down in the Civil War. If this goes too, that's the end of it. We'll never have another."

His wife and daughter heard him out attentively. Praskovya Petrovna seemed on the verge of tears; but Svetlana maintained stoutly:

"Well, and what of it? What do we need a house for? We can rent an apartment."

Opanasenko changed his tactics.

"All right, go ahead then," he said. "Leave me here alone." And softly, as though to himself, he added: "Everyone has two families. One is his relatives, the other—his collective. And I have none left at all. I've broken away from the collective, and my people are breaking away from me. Well, well, go ahead. I wish you happiness."

For some time after this he stayed day and night at the works, keeping away from home in a sort of endurance contest with his family. Praskovya Petrovna yielded. Resolutely (she could always be resolute when carrying out her husband's will), she declared that she would neither leave herself nor let Svetlana go.

"I'll lie down on the tracks before your train," she told her daughter. "You can go, if

you want to, over my body. But I won't leave your father here alone, and I won't stay here without you."

Had her father come home, had he shouted, fumed, forbidden. Svetlana might have evaded her mother's watchful eye and left. But her father had granted permission and disappeared. And--Svetlana stayed.

All her friends had already left, in any case, and had she determined to go she would have had to travel with strangers.

Then, one day, they learned that the last train was gone. Opanasenko, returning from the silent works, found his wife and daughter in tears.

"What are you whimpering at?" he demanded sternly, and added, with a contemptuous shrug. "We'll come through. I've seen plenty of foreigners in my day. I worked under Belgians, in the old times, and Frenchmen, and Germans, too. There was a German foreman at the works when I was young. All the bottles I drank with him, trying to worm out his steel-making secrets. And it was just wasted time. He knew less than I did. A rotter, he was, true enough. But just the same, he was a human being, not a wild beast."

Catching the German quartermaster's eye, Opanasenko's comfortable home was assigned to

three Hitlerite officers, who established themselves at once as masters in the household. Praskovya Petrovna was obliged to black their boots, launder their linen, and make their beds. True, they were neat and clean, and addressed Praskovya Petrovna civilly enough as "Multi"; and Opanasenko pretended to be quite pleased.

"There!" he told his wife. "Didn't I say they were no wild beasts? The washing, of course—that's hard on you, I know. But it can't be helped, Praskovya. Just be patient."

Actually, however, Opanasenko realized from the very first days of the occupation how greatly he had miscalculated. No, the Hitlerites were an entirely different breed, not to be compared with that one-time German foreman who had been a rotter, but not a beast. His heart cried, and his reason confirmed, that he had made a dreadful blunder. Opanasenko was ashamed to face his comrades at the works; but they, after all, had committed the same irreparable blunder as he. They, too, had seen fit to remain in the town under the Germans, and were now compelled, just as he was compelled, to work for the enemy. They were his equals in misfortune, and with them he could discuss the situation frankly.

At home, on the other hand, sensing his immeasurable guilt towards his wife, and partic-

ularly towards his daughter, Opanasenko attempted to conceal his true feelings—to pretend that all was going well and precisely as he had expected.

Svetlana was not to be fooled thus easily. She sensed the hollow ring behind her father's words. Moreover, Sasha often told her of Opanasenko's conduct at the works. Praskovya Petrovna, however, could only wonder at her husband's seeming patience. Deeply religious, of one of the "old believer" sects, Praskovya Petrovna had always submitted meekly to whatever blows fate might have in store; but she had never known her husband meek or submissive.

As an officers' billet, Opanasenko's home was safeguarded against night raids, against violence and plunder on the part of the German soldiery.

One of the officers, fair-haired and rather handsome, spent much of his spare time at the piano. Having played for his living at a dance hall in some German town, before the war, he rattled off his empty, jingling tunes with a certain professional skill.

When he grew tired of this strumming, he would go to the little room beside the kitchen, where Svetlana's bed and desk now stood, and ask the girl to play for him. This Svetlana bluntly and resolutely refused to do; but he became daily more persistent.

When the Germans were away from home, Svetlana would sit for hours at the piano, playing for herself. Opanasenko, listening from the kitchen, where he and his wife now lived, would exclaim delightedly:

"That's music, now. Our music. Real music. Not their silly tinkling—dum da da, dum da da. Why, when we beat the gong at the shop before tapping a melt, even, we used to make better music than that German does."

Saturdays were particularly unpleasant. The Hitlerites would usually bathe on Saturdays, splashing water over the bathroom floor and splattering the walls with soapsuds. It would be no easy task for Praskovya Petrovna to bring the room to rights when they were done.

"What can we do, Praskovya?" Opanasenko would mumble guiltily. "There's no helping it. Just make up your mind to bear it."

Towards eight o'clock Saturday evening, he Germans would leave for the brothel, where they usually remained until Sunday morning. Bolting the door behind them, Opanasenko would draw a long breath of relief. For a few hours, at least, he could live in peace and quiet, and feel himself once more the master in his own home. Often, on such nights, he would take a candle and wander about the house, glancing in at every room,

Once, returning down the hall towards the kitchen, he noticed a yellow gleam of light coming through the crack under Svetlana's door. He tiptoed softly to the door and looked in at the keyhole. Svetlana was at her desk, writing something industriously. Just so, with her head bent gracefully a little to the side, had she been wont to sit over her lessons. Opanasenko opened the door. Startled, she seized a little heap of notebook paper from the desk and pressed it to her body. Then she saw that the intruder was her father; but the fright did not vanish from her eyes.

"Afraid of me. As if I were a German," Opanasenko thought sorrowfully.

One sheet of paper had remained on the desk. Over the text, he saw the familiar red star.

He took his daughter in his arms and pressed her close, swallowing hard to restrain the tears. Then, kissing her tenderly as he never had before, he turned and left the room.

Next morning, catching a moment when Praskovya Petrovna was out of the house, he went to Svetlana and asked for one of her leaflets.

"If you can trust me," he added.

"Only be careful," she said, as she gave it to him. "You've got Sasha around at the shop, you know, and he's a volunteer."

"He's a good lad, Sasha," Opanasenko returned shakily. "And you're a good girl, too. Only it's so dangerous."

"That can't be helped, father," Svetlana said, with a ghost of a smile. "Mother prays to her God to forgive your sins, but I must make up for your sins to our Motherland."

Opanasenko shrank as though he had been struck. Turning heavily, he left the room.

But it was not the leaflets that brought catastrophe.

One Sunday morning, two of the Hitlerite officers returned from the brothel much earlier than usual. The third did not return at all.

Not until Monday did Praskovya Petrovna learn what had taken place. Neighbours whispered that a hand grenade had been flung in at the brothel window, just before daybreak; and the Opanasenkos' third lodger had been killed on the spot.

Next Saturday, the Germans stayed at home. A large company gathered in their rooms. Soon drunken songs resounded, interrupted by loud laugh'er and women's shrill cries. For some time, the fair-haired officer kept the piano jangling. At length, however, evidently tired of this exertion, he came staggering down the hall to Svetlana's

room and demanded that she play for his guests. She refused. Then the German locked the door to the kitchen, where Opanasenko and his wife were sitting, twisted the girl's arms behind her, and dragged her to the parlour.

A good manager, Opanasenko. His locks were strong, his doors hung on sturdy hinges. Try as he might, he could not wrench open the kitchen door. Half wild with horror and wrath, he rushed out to the woodshed and seized a hatchet, then, hurrying back to the kitchen, began to hack furiously at the door.

When at last the lower panel was out, and he could squeeze his great bulk through, he found Svetlana lying in the hall, unconscious, her bruised face covered with blood, the fingers of both hands black and swollen.

Only by protracted effort could her parents restore her to consciousness. Her eyelids fluttered open, and she whispered faintly:

"I didn't play for them. I never will. Ugh, the things I saw in there! Naked women. . . ."

Again she sank into forgetfulness.

Monday came. Opanasenko's hours at the works dragged on, an endless nightmare, in tormenting anxiety for his daughter. At last the whistle sounded, and he could hurry home. Praskovya Petrovna ran to meet him, frantic with grief, and

sobbed out her story on his breast. Svetlana had been taken off by politzais.

Opanasenko tapped at the parlour door.

The fair-haired German heard out his faltering plea with cold contempt.

"She iss one bad und stubborn girl," he said brusquely, when Opanasenko had finished. "I haff help her for to go in Germany. Our ladies will to teach her better manners."

He pointed to the door.

All next day Opanasenko trudged about the town, returning time and again to the employment bureau, to the town council, to police headquarters. He even succeeded in receiving an audience with the burgomaster. But nothing he could do or say was of any avail. They would not even tell him Svetlana's destination. He tried the railway station, where the warehouses were used as temporary jails for those awaiting despatch to Germany; but he was turned back at the outer gate.

Returning home, late in the evening, he found politzais waiting in the kitchen to arrest him for absence from work without leave.

All week he was kept on the works territory, under guard, as punishment for this offence.

And all week he did not speak a word to any of his comrades. Even Sasha was powerless to draw him out.

When, opportunity offering, the workers dropped their tools to rest and smoke, he would sit among them like a statue, staring blankly straight ahead. Sometimes, with a groan, he would sink his face in his hands; and heavy tears would roll down his grimy fingers.

At home, in the meantime, life went on as usual. A new German appeared in place of the one killed at the brothel. As always, three pair of boots were set out in the hall for blacking every night. Only the fair-haired Hitlerite began to grow a beard. The deep scratches on his cheeks made shaving impossible.

Opanasenko got home on Saturday evening—unwashed, unshaven, perceptibly aged in these few days. He flung himself down on his bed without undressing, and lay there motionless, in such stony silence that Praskovya Petrovna dared not speak to him.

In the Germans' rooms, festivities were commencing. Repeated knockings at the front door announced the arrival of numerous guests. There was a popping of corks, a tinkling of bottles and glasses. Women laughed shrilly. Then the floor began to vibrate to the tramp of dancing feet. Drunken shouts and laughter sounded ever louder. To Praskovya Petrovna, it seemed that the brothel had moved into her home, this night. Glancing

at her husband, still motionless on the bed, she wondered dully how he could sleep through it all.

As the night drew on, the inerriment gradually ceased. At length, the house was completely still.

Opanasenko got up, and threw back his shoulders sharply. Now, looking into his face, Praskovya Petrovna realized that he had not been asleep, that he had been waiting tensely for this moment.

"Bundle up as warm as you can, Praskovya Petrovna," he said, turning his face away. "Let's get out of here."

When she was ready, in a warm coat and shawl, he opened the door for her, and whispered:

"Wait for me by the gate."

A good manager, Opanasenko. His house had always been well supplied. And, safely hidden in the depths of his locked and bolted storeroom, there was still a goodly supply of kerosene.

A goodly supply, in a tall container—no easy load to carry. But Opanasenko did not find it heavy.

Softly opening the door to the parlour, he peered in at the Germans sprawled haphazard over the floor and the furniture. Soon he found what he was seeking. The fair-haired Hitlerite lay

fast asleep among his guests. Deep, long scratches disfigured his unshaven checks. Opanasenko shuddered violently. Stepping cautiously forward with his burden, he began to drip kerosene onto the rug.

A stout, red-haired German sniffed in his sleep, and sneezed. But he did not wake.

Opanasenko laid the container down on its side, letting the kerosene pour out freely. Returning to the hall, he set fire to a kerosene-soaked towel and threw it in at the parlour door. Swift streaks of flame went darting across the rug. Opanasenko shut the parlour door, turned the key twice in the lock, and left the house, locking every door behind him as he went. His wife was waiting at the gate. He took her arm and led her quickly away, without a backward glance. And she went with him, as she had always done, asking no questions and making no complaint.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

Vladislav Smakovsky was up against it.

At first he waited, in the hope that von Wechter might recall him to the works. But the baron showed no inclination to change his mind. At length, Smakovsky began to seek employment

elsewhere. This, however, turned out to be quite a difficult matter. No positions of any consequence were offered him. He might have received some petty clerking job at the town council—as book-keeper's assistant, say, in the utilities department. But that was clearly far beneath his dignity. Only in one place was he well received: police headquarters, where he was offered an appointment as chief of the political department. This, after some vacillation, he declined. It was flattering, but dangerous. He had no desire to risk his life a second time.

Completing his round of the town organizations, Smakovsky realized clearly that he had nothing to look forward to. Day after day, after breakfasting on whatever Irina had been able to get at the market place in exchange for clothing or household goods, he would hurry away from home to avoid questions and reproaches. Nor did this do him much good. His own thoughts were no more pleasant than her biting words.

For, looking back over his life, Smakovsky began to understand, clearly as never before, how mistaken he had been in attempting to base his career on lies and deceit.

Yes, Dmitri, his elder brother, had been wiser. On getting out of school, Dmitri had immediately

broken with his family. Later, on learning of his father's defection to Germany, he had promptly and publicly condemned it.

Vladislav, on the other hand, had sought refuge in concealment. To himself he had pretended, not altogether successfully, that he loved his father too dearly, respected him too highly, to resolve on public condemnation. Love, indeed! It had been nothing more than cowardice—than mortal terror lest this deplorable development hinder his career. He had dropped his studies, and later, under a slightly altered name, enrolled in a different institute. In his last year, however, this deception had been brought to light. Arriving at one of the Donbas works for student practice. Smakovsky had been recognized by the secretary of the works Party organization, Gayevoi, who had worked with his father in Siberia. A general student meeting had demanded Smakovsky's expulsion; but, after much pleading, he had been allowed to complete the year and earn his diploma. On graduation, he had been assigned to a position at the same works where he had been exposed. Then life had proceeded normally enough, until the war broke out and turned everything topsy-turvy.

From the first day of the war, Smakovsky's every action had been based upon the firm con-

viction that Germany would be the victor. He had hoped great things from friendship with the "conquerors"; but his hopes had been bitterly disappointed.

Thoughts of the past were painful; of the present—unbearable; of the future—terrifying. If one could only manage not to think at all! But something had to be done, some way found of earning his bread. Take a pick and go to work with Opanasenko's crew, in the open-hearth shop? Endure their mocking smiles and caustic sarcasms? No. There seemed no solution to his difficulty. Why had he stayed here to meet the Germans? Again, as in his youth, he had chosen the wrong path. Again he found himself in a blind alley.

Yet he had been warned.

Gayevoi had sent for him, during the evacuation.

"I'm sorry to disturb you after hours," he had begun, "but right now all hours are more or less the same. Draw up a chair. I want to talk to you."

Sitting down, Smakovsky had lit a cigarette and waited silently for the Party secretary to go on.

"I wonder," Gayevoi had asked, "were you very much surprised at being assigned to this

particular works, when you graduated? I suppose you were. Surprised and, probably, displeased."

Smakovsky had shrugged noncommittally.

"It was done at my request," Gayevoi had continued. "And I can tell you why I made that request. I knew your father, knew him only too well, and I hoped you might be prevented from following in his footsteps. I've taken some interest in you, these past years. At times it has seemed to me that the works environment was doing its job, was providing the training your parents deprived you of by keeping you out of school. But at other times I've been worried and upset by the sort of things I've heard you say. And just now I'm very much afraid. . . ."

"That I'll follow my father? That the apple falls near the tree?" Smakovsky had put in harshly.

"No. I have no faith in such theories. They're sufficiently disproved by your own brother. What worries me—what has always bothered me—is a different thing: your dislike for everything Russian. What's the cause of it? Your diploma thesis, for example—you didn't mention a single Russian authority. But we needn't dwell on that. The point is, your general attitude. There was a conversation one day—perhaps you remember it—in

the course of which you remarked that the Russian character, to you, remains an unknown quantity. Other national characters, you said, have their specific, clearly outlined traits: vivacity in the French, practical common sense in the British, pedantry in the Germans. That seems to be your conception of national character: some one clearly outlined trait, more conspicuous than others. And the Russian character appears to you indefinite, amorphous, lacking specific traits of any kind. Right? Isn't that how you put it?"

"Yes, that's so." Smakovsky had been compelled to admit.

"And I suppose it's never occurred to you," Gayevoi had continued, "that the Russian character is not to be summed up in any one trait; that it must be seen from all its many aspects, like an intricately cut gem, to be properly appreciated. Nor, I suppose, have you ever noticed that the most glorious of all these many aspects is self-abnegating love for the Soviet Motherland. You've never stopped to think about these things. I know. Give them a little thought."

But his advice had fallen on barren soil. Smakovsky's mind had been occupied with only one thing, at the moment: uneasy surmises as to what might be the purpose of this interview. Gayevoi had proceeded:

"You made a grave misstep at one time. It was forgiven, and never cast up against you. You received every opportunity to rehabilitate yourself, to earn trust and confidence. Today, it's up to you to pass the political test: to evacuate with the works, to work and defend your Motherland—Russia. Russians have only one Motherland. They can have no other, ever. And another thing: it was the Soviet state that made you an engineer. You have that debt to pay. There, that's all I wanted to say. I won't detain you any longer. Think it over."

Inwardly fuming, Smakovsky had thanked Gayevoi for his attention, and at the same time expressed a certain surprise that, in days like these, the Party secretary should have found time for such a conversation. He was very grateful for this solicitude, of course, but, nonetheless, profoundly and undeservedly injured. How could the Party secretary doubt for an instant his, Smakovsky's, utter devotion to the Motherland? Was this, perhaps, the result of slander?

But Gayevoi had only shrugged and, looking deep into Smakovsky's eyes, dismissed him.

Had Smakovsky's career under the Germans turned out as successfully as he had hoped, this conversation might never have recurred to mind—except, perhaps, as something to make mock of.

Now, however, every word then said came back as clearly as though it had been but yesterday.

"Gayevoi was right," he mused. "I should have evacuated and kept on working. That was the only thing to do—in any case, for those who had faith in their country, for those who loved it."

But Smakovsky had neither faith nor love. All his life, he had admired only that which was not Russian—had looked up to foreigners, of whatever nationality, considering them wiser, stronger, and more highly organized than his fellow countrymen. Why, then, should he have evacuated, when at last opportunity offered of merging with these superior beings?

Worst of all was his feeling of guilt towards Irina. It had been his persuasion that had made her stay; and now she was condemned to misery.

Only one hope remained: if Irina could be persuaded to go to von Wechter and plead for her husband, then, perhaps. . . . It was some time before Smakovsky could key himself up to this request. At length, however, over a particularly meagre breakfast, he attempted a roundabout approach to the subject.

Irina understood immediately what he had in mind, and what he was counting on. She nodded

agreement, without a word. Noting the barely perceptible twitch of her lips, however, he realized that he had lost all remnant of her esteem.

Von Wechter received Irina very cordially, heaping her with elaborate compliments; but he refused to hear a word about her husband.

"It's purely a man's affair," he told her, smiling. "A situation for you, now—that's a different story. That I can discuss with pleasure."

And he offered her a place as his secretary.

Irina accepted without a moment's hesitation. This talk had made it very clear to her that she had no one to rely on but herself.

After work one day, as she was preparing to leave for home, von Wechter called her into his office.

"Frau Irène," he said, "I have a favour to ask of you. Help me arrange the furnishings in my apartment. A woman's dainty taste is so essential in such matters."

An unexpected request, and, perhaps, not altogether a tactful one. But Irina agreed.

The baron's apartment was a veritable furniture warehouse, filled to overflowing with large and ill-assorted articles collected from many different homes. There were two grand pianos, and half a dozen sofas. Several paintings stood about,

with their faces to the walls. Irina's heart sank. Only by dint of long and strenuous effort, with the aid of four sturdy soldiers who shifted the heavy things about from place to place at her bidding, did she succeed in transforming this display of loot into something more or less reminiscent of a human dwelling place.

On the third evening she pronounced the task completed. The baron, highly pleased, asked her to play hostess at his housewarming.

A brilliant company assembled, the very cream of local society: Pfaul, Gestapo chief Sonnewald, the commander of the local garrison, and several officers. The festivities continued until morning; for it was not safe to walk the streets at night.

Irina did not return home that day, or on any of the following days.

She never looked back. Having once set her foot on the ladder, she advanced lightly from rung to rung—upwards, she was convinced. She felt no regrets, no vacillation. No shadow of remorse stirred in her paltry soul. Life was forming itself after her dreams. Some day, von Wechter would take her to Germany. She could see it all so vividly! Riding through Berlin, she would recognize the streets—had she not read of them, in so many novels!—with the air of one

returning to familiar scenes after a protracted absence.

"Ah, yes, this is Unter den Linden," she would say to the baton as they drove along that handsome avenue.

The past seldom came to mind, and aroused no qualms of conscience. Who, in her place, would have acted differently? No one! Of that she had no doubt. Given the same good luck, who could have turned it down? Why, even Krainev, who had sincerely wanted to evacuate, and had tried to persuade her, too, to leave—even Krainev, when by some incomprehensible turn of fate he remained in town, had changed front fast enough and gone to work for the Germans. And besides, what could she be reproached with? She had done no one any harm. If people were suffering, that was not her fault. And as to her private life, surely that was her own, to direct and order as she might please.

There were times when she missed her little boy. But after all, she told herself, she was better off without him. He might have annoyed von Wechter.

The days flowed on, in soothing monotony. Her hours at the office over, Irina would hurry home to set the table. Exactly at five, von Wechter would arrive for dinner.

Accustomed to his punctuality, she felt a vague uneasiness when, one day, he failed to appear at the usual hour. Six o'clock passed, and seven; and still he did not come. At length, the telephone rang. Von Wechter's voice sounded in the receiver.

"I have unpleasant news, Irène," he murmured smoothly. "My wife is arriving tomorrow morning. You'll understand, of course, that you and I must part. Oh, temporarily, only temporarily! I'm sending a car around, and the orderly will help you pack your things and move to other rooms. We'll meet there, in time, my angel."

As he spoke, the receiver seemed to grow heavier and heavier in Irina's hand, until she felt that in another moment she must let it fall.

An hour later the orderly, loaded with valises, led her upstairs in a house she had never seen before, and ushered her into her new quarters—a room in some apartment occupied by utter strangers.

The night passed in dreary reflections. Next morning, as usual, Irina set out for the works.

At the gates she was stopped by the politσαι on duty. Spreading his arms to bar the way, he told her mockingly:

"No go, my girl. You're not to be let in. The baron's orders."

Irina turned sharply on her heel and hurried away. After a while, however, she turned back. Yes, she would wait at the gates until von Wechter came out. She would slap his smooth-shaven, aristocratic mug. She would spit into his muddy blue eyes, under the heavy lids.

But five o'clock was far away. Too long, too humiliating, to stand about and wait. She dragged herself home and dropped into bed. Alarmed by her condition, the mistress of the apartment ran off to fetch a doctor.

Irina recognized the doctor when he came: a little old man, known as the town's best physician. He sank into a chair, panting for breath. He had heart trouble, and walking tired him. Before the war, the clinic had always provided a car to take him to his patients.

When he had rested a few minutes, he got out a pair of glasses, raised them carefully, in trembling fingers, to his eyes, and glanced at the patient. He was on his feet immediately.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed. "There's been some misunderstanding. I don't treat adults. I'm a children's doctor."

Irina knew that he was lying. She did not answer, but her eyes flashed hate.

The old man moved slowly towards the door. Pausing at the threshold, he said into space:

"The Germans hanged a young girl yesterday. She worked in the machine shop. They hanged her because she struck a German soldier when he tried to molest her. Yes, she struck out, knowing the penalty, rather than. . . . Mmm."

He flung open the door and left.

Irina bit her lip to the quick.

Somehow, she must live, must find means of subsistence. The contents of her valises soon melted away at the market place. It was little enough that she could get for her pretty clothes. People had no need of such things, nowadays. Clothing was bought for utility and warmth.

Irina decided to try her luck with Pfaul.

The Kommandant received her warmly; but his insinuating gallantry put her at once on her guard. He heard out her request for employment with an air of the utmost readiness to understand and assist.

"Why, nothing could be simpler," he declared, smiling. "We have an establishment in town—well, a pleasure resort, one might call it, exclusively for officers. . . ."

Irina sprang to her feet.

"No, no, don't think any evil!" Pfaul exclaimed reassuringly. "You will be simply the

hostess, the adornment, you see, of the drawing room."

"You're forgetting," Irina flared. "You're forgetting that I . . . that I . . ."

He met her fury with a mocking smile.

"You're forgetting a great deal yourself, my little sweetheart," he returned. "Hadn't we better forget about memories?"

Irina turned and ran.

When she got outdoors, the day was damp and foggy, and she could see nothing ahead.

When Irina left him for von Wechter, Smakovsky sought solace in drink. Like all people of his type—insolent when fortune smiles, but losing balance at the first sign of trouble—he began to go to pieces rapidly. His rooms grew daily barer, the furnishings going in exchange for vodka.

Then, one day, Pivovarov came to see him.

Drink had not improved Smakovsky's appearance. His face was bloated, his eyes clouded over, his clothing rumpled and stained. Pivovarov hedged about for some time, debating with himself what help he might expect from such a deplorable wreck. In the end, however, he blurted out his story, concealing only the visit he had paid to Vals' y.

Smakovsky's intoxication vanished instantly. He had always disliked Krainev, and of late this dislike had developed into a mixture of fear and inveterate hate. To avoid meeting Krainev, after the latter's reappearance at the works, Smakovsky, despite his duties as works manager, had entirely excluded the machine shop from his daily rounds of inspection. And now, if all that Pivovarov said was true, Krainev could be done away with, and the Germans' favour regained, at one swift blow.

"Your proofs?" Smakovsky demanded tersely.

"What do you mean—proofs?" flared Pivovarov. "Lobachov was waiting impatiently for the Germans. He didn't stay here to wreck. Why, he had a hundred thousand marks, all safe, in a Berlin bank! He told me so himself."

Lobachov, it seemed, being sent to Germany some years before to purchase needed equipment, had switched an order from the Demag to the Bamag concern in return for a bribe received from the latter.

"And anyway," Pivovarov continued, "the thing's as clear as daylight. What proof do you need? Look—Lobachov knew I'd been a White officer in the Civil War, and not the Red Guard fighter I made myself out to be. He knew it for years, and yet he never blabbed."

Smakovsky's elation grew with every word.

"There's only one thing," Pivovarov concluded. "I'm afraid to go to the Germans. They'd believe you, though, if you told them about it. Help me out, won't you, Vladislav Grigoryevich?"

"Yes, I'll help you," Smakovsky answered firmly; and, having shown his guest to the door, he sat down to think over the best course of action.

He could not make up his mind to go to the Gestapo. The very memory of Sonnewald's frosty eyes sent a shiver up his spine. In the end, he went to Pfaul, at the Kommandantur, and set forth in full detail all that he had learned from Pivovarov. Pfaul heard the story out with an air of complete indifference; but as soon as Smakovsky had left he hurried to Sonnewald's office. The Gestapo chief was out, however, and did not return until late in the evening.

When Pfaul had made his report, Sonnewald called in the head of his information department, who soon appeared with a folder labelled "Krainev."

Sonnewald leafed the folder attentively. There were several informers' reports, describing Krainev's active work during the evacuation period and the manner of his little boy's departure for

the Urals. Another report, signed by the chief of the guards at the power station, described the strange conduct of the chief of the Russian guards during his visit to the station.

"Have him arrested at once, and bring him here to me, tied hand and foot," Sonnewald commanded, shutting the folder.

The head of the information department hurried out. Turning to Pfaul, Sonnewald remarked:

"Big game, that protégé of yours, Herr Kommandant."

Pfaul hung his head, but insisted glumly:

"Well, but, look here: you know yourself they tried to kill him."

"Play acting."

"Never! You can't act a thing like that!"

Pfaul's voice rang with conviction. He did not care about Krainev: it was himself he was defending.

But Sonnewald replied, with a grim smile:

"It's easily explained. There were several partisan groups in town at that time, and--fortunately for us--they were still unconnected, didn't know one another's plans. Hence, the attempt on Krainev. Simple enough!"

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

The Hitlerite officer examined the bomb, then gave some order to one of the soldiers. The soldier went off, and did not return for quite some time. Settling down to wait, the workers began to roll "horseleg" cigarettes. Krainev, too, felt in his pocket; but his supply of cigarettes had ended. He went up to the workers and asked for a smoke. Nobody moved to comply with his request. They did not even seem to see or hear him.

Krainev turned away. He had grown used to this atmosphere of hatred. The more the workers hated him, the more highly he respected them.

The soldier returned, carrying a set of wrenches. With elaborate care, he removed the detonator from the bomb. This done, the officer nodded carelessly, as though to say that now the Russian chief of guards might dispose of the bomb as he pleased, and strode away, followed by the soldiers.

Greatly relieved, Krainev ordered his men back to work. They loaded the bomb onto the waiting cars, and rolled the cars to a nearby siding. By a mere shift of the switch, this siding could be connected with that part of the line

which led downhill into the boiler room of the power station.

Evening was gathering by the time the work was done. The men all left. Now it remained only to wait for darkness.

Noticing a few stubs among the coal, Krainev picked them up, crushed them in his palm, and rolled himself a cigarette. The bitter smoke made him cough, but he noticed neither taste nor odour.

More than once, he put his watch to his ear, thinking it must have stopped—so slowly did the moments drag. Time itself seemed to have come to a standstill. Would it never end, this dreary winter day?

The last light faded. Krainev peered intently through the darkness. Nothing suspicious. He circled the coal yard. Nothing. He waited, listening. Not a sound came through the night but the rattle of furnace doors being opened and shut in the boiler room. He walked down the track, and shifted the switch.

All at once, his firm restraint collapsed. With furiously beating heart, he ran back to the bomb and set to work, stuffing ammonite into the space where the detonator had been and adjusting his own detonators and fuses. He worked with feverish haste; yet it seemed to him that he was losing far too much time.

Now all was ready. He set a match to the fuses. They caught.

Running to the back of the cars, he tried to set them moving. They did not budge. He pushed with all his might. They did not budge. The grease in the axle boxes had frozen.

His knees buckled, and he sank to the ground. But he was up again immediately, pushing desperately.

The fuses burned steadily, closer and closer to the detonators. It was as though the fire licked at his own limbs. The cars did not move.

Suddenly, a door creaked. Two figures emerged from the shanty in the corner of the coal yard, and came running towards Krainev.

Familiar figures, both of them. Now they were close enough to recognize: Serdyuk, and Pyotr Prasolov. Serdyuk, coming up first, immediately put his shoulder to the cars. They moved. They were off, down the slope, bouncing slightly over the joints of the rails. Krainev ran behind, still pushing. Then he let go, but did not turn back until he saw the bomb go in through the boiler room door.

"Come back!" Serdyuk was calling. "Come back, you crazy fool!"

Watching Krainev from the shanty, he had glanced at his watch when the fuses were fired.

They had been timed to burn eight minutes. Only three remained.

Krainev turned back, and all three ran up the tracks, following the line that led away from the town.

"Down!" Serdyuk cried, dropping to the ground.

Krainev and Prasolov dropped beside him.

The earth shook under them. Deafened by the explosion, they did not hear the clatter of flying sheets of iron, the tinkle of broken glass, the crash of falling bricks. But, sitting up, they saw a huge black column of smoke rising over the power station.

Krainev sat motionless, a happy smile playing on his lips.

"Let's go," Serdyuk said, jogging his shoulder.

They left the tracks and ran straight across the drifted snow. Soon they were over the works wall and out in the open steppe.

"Well, now your work behind the lines is over," Serdyuk told Krainev. "But ours is just beginning. Give our greetings to our people over there. Good luck to you. If we come through alive, we'll meet again."

He embraced Krainev, and turned away.

"We'll come through, all right. And we'll be expecting you with the Red Army," said Prasolov confidently, enclosing Krainev's proffered hand in a firm, comradely grip.

And so they parted.

Krainev strode on across the steppe, towards the faint line of light at the horizon. His heart was full to overflowing with a poignant, long unknown happiness.

The boundless spaces of his Motherland lay before him.

